



# The Oblate

*News Magazine of the Oblates of Saint John's Abbey*

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## Fall Day of Reflection — November 16, 2014



Michael Patella, OSB

### Living with Liturgy and Scripture in Autumn

While nature turns to death and dying with the approach of winter, we find ourselves responding in kind to the shorter days, the darker hours, and the chillier winds. Liturgy in the northern hemisphere reflects the changes in our environment and in ourselves. For our reflection during this time of year, we will look at what the liturgical readings say as the leaves fall and the fields die.

**Registration is necessary for our preparations, and it is easy: simply inform the oblate office that you will attend.**

<b>Cost:</b> Free-will offering	<b>12:45</b> Group <i>Lectio Divina</i>
<b>9:30</b> Arrival in Great Hall	<b>1:30</b> Fr. Michael's Conference
<b>10:30</b> Community Eucharist	<b>2:30</b> Discussion and Prayer
<b>11:30</b> Lunch in Q264	<b>3:00</b> Departure

A Benedictine monk of Saint John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota, Father Michael Patella, OSB, is a professor of New Testament and teaches in both the undergraduate theology department and the graduate School of Theology•Seminary at Saint John's University, where he serves as seminary rector and the director of the graduate school's Holy Land Studies Program. He earned a License in Sacred Scripture from Rome's Pontifical Biblical Institute and a Doctorate in Sacred Scripture from the École biblique et archéologique française in Jerusalem.

He has published in the areas of Luke, Mark, Paul, angels, and demons, and also has written for *The Bible Today*. His most recent book, *Word and Image: the Hermeneutics of The Saint John's Bible*, is the fruit of his work as chair of the Committee on Illumination and Texts for *The Saint John's Bible*. Father Michael is a member of the Catholic Biblical Association.



## Letter from Abbot John



Dear Oblates,

I recently read what turned out to be a very important book for me, *The Power of Habit*, by Charles Duhigg. The author opens the book with a startling example of a young woman (Lisa) who changes a keystone habit. Let me explain the meaning of this term with a defining example.

Lisa determines to quit smoking, and that commitment allows her to change, bit by bit, a whole set of other habits in her life. She would start running half marathons, then a marathon, and then she went back to school, bought a house, and got engaged.

Eventually she was recruited into a major study of habit changes. When the researchers began to examine images of Lisa's brain, they saw something remarkable. One set of neurological patterns, her old habits, had been overridden by new patterns. They could see the neural activity of her old behaviors, but those impulses were crowded out by new urges. As Lisa's habits changed, so had her brain.

We are creatures of habit, by necessity. We learn early on that the more things we can do automatically, quickly, without a lot of thought, the more efficiently we can move through the day. This both solves some problems and creates others, because some habits are life-giving and others can be awkward over time, and some flat out destructive. We know the wisdom saying, "Old habits die hard."

To understand habits, the way they are formed, the way we un-choose and unlearn them, as well as the way we learn, test, and develop new habits, is important in many areas of our life, especially as we live longer. Changing habits is a fundamental skill in our desire for conversion and growing closer to God. It helps us to be more faithful to prayer, more loving to our spouses, to our coworkers, and to those who need our love.

In the conclusion of chapter seven, on humility, Saint Benedict writes: "Now, therefore, after ascending all these steps of humility, the monastic will quickly arrive at that perfect love of God which casts out fear. Through this love, all that she once performed with dread, she will now begin to observe without effort, as though naturally, from habit, no longer out of fear of hell, but out of love for Christ, good habit and delight in virtue. All this the Lord, by the Holy Spirit, will graciously manifest in the worker, now cleansed of vices and sins" (RB 7.67-70).

I found that Duhigg's book allowed me to think in a fresh and integrative way about changing key habits in my life.

## Letter from Father Michael



Dear Oblates,

One of the first assignments I received upon arrival at Saint John's Abbey was working with our oblates. Although I was not the Oblate Director at my former monastery at Blue Cloud Abbey, I was very aware of the growing importance of oblates to a monastic community.

What is this importance? Very simply, it is community. All that we do as Benedictines comes from a profound sense of community mindfulness. The relationship between monastic community and oblate is one of mutuality. The monastic community is not somehow holier than the oblate community, showering all that we know about the *Rule* to our oblates who are mere recipients. No, humility says that we learn from one another.

I am profoundly challenged and encouraged by our oblates. I see the *Rule* lived out in ways that are entirely authentic and wise. For example: an oblate who is learning to listen more to his students in imitation of Benedict's call to hear from the wisdom of its newest monks; an inmate learning the profound challenge of hospitality while living in prison; an oblate who has decided to "stay-put" in a town after years of moving around in imitation of our values of stability; an oblate who volunteers in our retirement center, helping our elderly monks, in imitation of Benedict's strong insistence that care for our elders must come before all else; an oblate in the military who has found the discipline of praying the Liturgy of the Hours as a source of profound spiritual sustenance. I could go on and on.

The good news is that the community of Saint John's Abbey is much bigger than the men who wear black robes! I believe other monastic communities are finding this true as well. The fact that many monasteries are receiving more and more guests who share in the prayer life of monasteries, and that there are so many resources now available about Benedictine spirituality, attests to the fact that people are looking for wisdom to guide them to encounter the holy in their day-to-day lives.

So, I envision an oblate program that can strengthen even more, both its formation of our oblate candidates, oblates and local chapters. I would hope that more local chapters could be created at a grassroots level. There are also opportunities to create links between our oblate program and the spiritual needs of our undergrad students.

As our oblate program moves ahead, I am so thankful for the past two years that I have worked with Father Don and that he will be continuing to minister to our oblates — especially through our newsletter and our local chapters.

## News and Notes . . .

**Abbot John** appointed Fr. Michael Peterson as Oblate Director and Fr. Don Tauscher as Assistant Oblate Director after his three-year term as Director. Father Don continues as editor of *The Oblate*.

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**Oblate Weldon Nisly**, retired Mennonite pastor, represented **Bridgfolk**, an organization of Mennonites and Roman Catholic monks dedicated to peacemaking by way of interfaith dialogue, at the thirteenth annual conference, held at Saint John's 24-27 July. The conference focused on *Service: An Overflow of Christ's Love*. Also in attendance were Abbot John, Br. John Hanson, Br. Aelred Senna, and Fr. John Meoska. Weldon has been a resident scholar at our Collegetown Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research.



In keeping with peacemaking, Weldon spent September 18 to October 5 in Iraqi Kurdistan where he joined the Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) delegation. He had gone there in March 2003 and in January 2010. CPT collaborates with local people to offer a nonviolent presence for peace, advocate for those who suffer oppression, and to tell their stories to the world. He writes, "I know in my heart that it is a lie to love our children and grandchildren while participating in harming other children and grandchildren on the other side of the world. Even our silence is complicity in the lies of war."

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**Oblate Peg Gawne-Mark** announced her retirement from chaplaincy at Essentia Health in Duluth effective November 7. She and her husband Cliff, also an oblate of Saint John's, will move to Dothan, Alabama, near their daughter's family. Peg has made significant contributions to oblate life here for many years, and she says that she and Cliff intend to return occasionally for oblate activities.

**Oblate Regional Chapters** have reconvened. At the **Fargo** meeting on 13 September, the group decided to begin meetings on the second Saturday at 9:45, skipping December, January, and February, but meeting March through November. They are discussing Michael Casey's *Road to Eternal Life*. Judy Doll, oblate of Annunciation Monastery in Bismarck ND, continues to serve as contact person.

At the **Collegetown** chapter on September 21, the members decided to meet every month but August. November, March, and July are Days of Reflection and annual retreat, taking the place of usual meetings. Discussion continues to spring from Casey's *Road to Eternal Life*, and a different oblate leads the meeting each month.

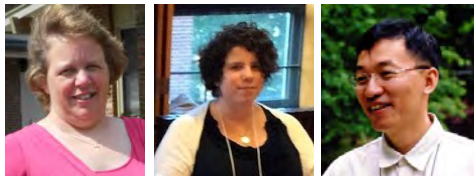
The **Joan of Arc** chapter continues to meet on a schedule provided by the leader and contact person, Oblate Ron Joki. Several weeks before each meeting, Ron sends each member a reflection on the topic to be discussed.

**The Basilica of Saint Mary** chapter in Minneapolis will be making changes as the Friday p.m. meeting time is not working out. Twin City oblates are urged to consider joining in and forming a meeting plan. Contact Chris Kosowski at kosowski@juno.com

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### New Candidates

Do not grant newcomers to the monastic life an easy entry but *test the spirits to see if they are from God (RB 58:1)*.



Tracy

Emily

Paul

**Tracy Dereszynski**, from West Bend WI, is looking for the support of a community in the journey of life.

**Emily Stamp**, from St. Joseph MN, wants to deepen her prayer life and have a stronger connection with the Saint John's Abbey community.

**Paul Huh**, originally from Korea, is now a resident scholar at the Collegetown Institute. A liturgist by profession, he wants to be engaged more with the liturgical tradition at Saint John's.

**Marilyn Cavanaugh**, from Minneapolis MN, is drawn to the oblate program which models ways of living a more sacred life in the day-to-day.

**Frank Zeck**, from Lisbon ND, desires a structured method of engaging in community prayer, along with the prayer and support of fellow oblates and the monastic community.

**Dian Zeck**, from Lisbon ND, learned about oblates during a retreat at Saint John's Abbey. She seeks to learn about St. Benedict's *Rule* and how it fits in today's life. Dian wants to: grow better in her relationship to God; learn more about her Catholic faith; associate with others on this pathway; and pray with others in the ways of the Benedictines.

### Remember the Deceased

**Janice Drout**, 88, died in Brookfield WI on July 19, 2014. Janice was an oblate of Saint John's for 64 years. She is survived by six children, 20 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren.



**Marie Burggraff**, 96, died in Carlton MN on August 30, 2014. She attended the College of Saint Scholastica in Duluth, and made her oblation in 1951. For many years she cared for her mother, always treasuring oblate life.



**Doran Evenson**, 83, died in Moorhead MN on September 28, 2014, surrounded by his loving family. Doran grew up and graduated from high school in Minot ND. In 1991 he and his wife Sharon moved to Fargo. They became oblates of Saint John's in July 1996 and were active in the Fargo chapter until Doran's health failed.



## Dr. Julia Upton, RSM, Oblate Research

In October 2013 we sent the following invitation to everyone on our oblate e-mail list.

You are invited to participate in a research project on oblates for the American Benedictine Academy. The theme for the convention to be held [in summer 2014] is "Benedictine Monasticism: The Past Receiving the Future." Dr. Julia Upton, RSM, has been charged to survey oblates around the country and analyze the data so that we have more than anecdotal evidence with which to continue the conversation between tradition and new expressions of the Benedictine charism.



On August 5 **Sister Julia Upton, RSM**, Distinguished Professor of Theology at St. John's University ("the other" St. John's) in Jamaica, NY, where Oblate Michael Callaghan also teaches, gave a presentation on her research on oblates in

the United States to the monastic community. Her presentation was entitled "Benedictine Oblates, Profile and Analysis: Glorifying God by Their Lives" and covered issues such as the demographics of oblates, religious affiliation, time of oblation, and a host of others.

With her permission, we offer a small portion of the data she compiled and presented.

### Reasons for Becoming an Oblate

- Strengthen Faith/ Formalize Spirituality (N=202)
- Deeper Connection with a Spiritual Community (N=149)
- The *Rule* of St. Benedict (N=124)
- Interest in Benedictine/ Monastic Spirituality (N=132)
- Deepen Prayer Life (N=87)
- More Structured Spiritual Instruction (N=59)
- Personal Fulfillment (N=48)
- Association w/ Benedictine Education (N=38)
- Meeting Others of Like-Mind (N=33)
- Influenced by Friend/ Family (N=33)
- Call from God (N=28)
- Welcoming Benedictine Community (N=27)
- Influenced by Benedictine Text/ Book (N=23)
- Previous Parish did not Satisfy Spiritual Needs (N=20)
- Visit to Abbey (N=20)

### Reasons for Remaining

- Source of Spiritual Growth & Support (N=206)
- The Community of Oblates (N=156)
- Drawn to the *Rule*/ Benedictine Teachings (N=153)
- Connection with Monastery / Abbey (N=129)
- Central to Personal Life/ Identity (N=78)
- Sense of Fulfillment w/ Decision (N=78)
- Same Reasons for Becoming an Oblate (N=77)
- Daily Prayer Life (N=68)
- Close Relationships w/ Monks & Sisters (N= 66)
- Sense of Commitment & Loyalty (N=30)

### Oblate Comments

- A guide for living a healthy life. The discipline of the Lectio, prayer and attitude toward living life in balance is such a joy for me. I am prone to getting off balance as a workaholic. The *Rule* keeps me on track. The oblate meetings ... and fellow oblates are essential.
- The *Rule* is like a trellis on which to grow. The Daily Office gives structure to my day. The *Rule* gives structure to my inner life.
- I have grown in spirit and a desire to serve God and neighbor through my oblation. It has been tremendously enriching for me and given me a way to bring the riches of monastic life to many others outside of the community. Thanks be to God.
- Being an oblate strengthens my ecumenical contacts and the diversity of spiritualities to which I am exposed. It reminds me of my desire to continue to grow closer to God and the ways I can do so.
- I'm a more loving person. I care more about not just others, but all living creatures, as well as our environment. I take better care of myself and all of the gifts God has given us. I am more aware of the presence of God all around me. I try to listen more. I pray more. I give more.
- Quietly, my life has changed radically and fundamentally, not in my life circumstances; rather, in the choices I make, in how I receive others, in the work I do, the presence of the rhythm of prayer in my day, and in my awareness of the presence of God in the shared creation around me.
- I fell in love with the silence, the peace, the chapel and my time praying with the monks. I wanted to extend that to my home that was far away from the community.

## Celebrating and Reflecting on 25 Years as Oblates

Oblates **Ron Joki** and **Katherine Wallace** have been a vital part of the oblate program at Saint John's Abbey since 1989. We rejoice in celebrating the 25th anniversary of their oblations. Ron works at the University of Minnesota and lives in the Twin Cities. Katherine lives in Canada and is a retired priest in the Anglican Church of Canada. Both their lives show how lay and clergy, women and men, and oblates both near and far from the Abbey, have found meaning as oblates. Recently, **Oblate Phil Boelter** interviewed them and asked each to share some insights.

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Phil:</b> How did you first become interested in becoming a Benedictine oblate?                  | <b>Ron:</b> The Holy Spirit introduced me to a monk of Saint John's Abbey who became my spiritual director. When we would talk about my spiritual journey, the topic of oblates frequently came up.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | <b>Katherine:</b> I had long been drawn to Benedictine monastic life and had read and studied in some depth. I also had a passion for prayer, a love of God and community.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Phil:</b> What drew you to the Saint John's Abbey oblate program?                                | <b>Ron:</b> Visiting the Abbey for the first time I knew that I somehow wanted to remain connected to this community. I was both drawn by the loving presence of God in this group of monks and yet unwilling, from a sense of unworthiness, to think that I could be a real part of it. Over time I learned to set aside my ego's apprehensions and to trust the words of Saint Benedict: "What can be sweeter to us than the voice of the Lord inviting us?" How could I say no to such an invitation?                                                   | <b>Katherine:</b> Quite simply, God sent me a monk from Saint John's. I came, and found I had come home.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Phil:</b> How has being a Benedictine oblate affected/influenced your life and faith?            | <b>Ron:</b> It has given me stability in my spiritual journey and joy in being in company with such a wonderful group of seekers. It has introduced regularity in my prayer life and given me many ways of serving God through the monastic community of monks and oblates as well as in the rest of my life. This has allowed me to see and share how the love of God is for all people and all of creation.                                                                                                                                              | <b>Katherine:</b> Being part of the oblate community is a reflection of life with the whole monastic community. With others, I am drawn to seek nothing but Christ in this place of pilgrims seeking God in prayer and listening, while bearing one another in love. I am grateful to be held in the embrace of God by the whole community, professed and oblates.                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Phil:</b> How has the oblate program changed from 1989 to now?                                   | <b>Ron:</b> Through the grace of the Spirit, the oblate program has always had caring and creative directors who continue to expand the monastic community's expression of hospitality and generosity. This has resulted in much more oblate involvement in the community and many more opportunities for oblates and monks to share God's gifts with each other and many others with whom we come in contact. Oblates have been more empowered to let the Holy Spirit work in and through them while being nourished spiritually by the Benedictine life. | <b>Katherine:</b> As oblates have grown and learned in faith, I think there is a deeper awareness in the whole monastic community at Saint John's of the presence and gift which oblates are to each other and the whole community. The journey to oblate life is taken very seriously by our directors and we are encouraged and challenged to study, pray, discern, and live the life in fidelity. There is also, now, a strong network of prayer support for each other and the whole community. I also appreciate the intentional commitment of Abbot John to keep in touch with us. |
| <b>Phil:</b> If you could give only one piece of advice to your fellow oblates, what would that be? | <b>Ron:</b> Seek to know God's infinite and unconditional love in a very intentional way each day, to see Christ in every person, to pray to be a conduit of that love and to prefer nothing to Christ. If we know how dearly we are loved by God even through our failings and fallings, we will more easily love even those with whom we disagree, even those who are "on the other side" and even those who hurt us.                                                                                                                                    | <b>Katherine:</b> Come and see!                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

## Annual Oblate Retreat, July 18-20



Half of the nearly 90 oblates and candidates who attended the retreat are pictured under the abbey bell banner immediately after celebrating the Eucharist on Saturday morning — and immediately before lunch! See the others on the next page.



Along with Fathers Don and Michael, Abbot John received the oblation of six candidates: (L-R) **John Biggs** (Pahrump NV) works in ministry with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and is interested in the writings of Saint John Casian and Evagrius of Pontus; **Pat Couteaux** (Maple Grove) has researched the relationship of Mary within the context of Benedictine spirituality; **Robert Emery** (Sparta WI) has been active in lay ministry with the United Church of

Christ; **Sheila Hughes-Tembrock** (St. Cloud) recently married Oblate Jim Tembrock—both are active in the pro-life movement; **Richard Marsolek** (Bemidji) has a deep love for the *Rule* of Benedict and has compiled a study booklet for his personal use; **James Secord** (Edina) has worked with Liturgical Press and *The Saint John's Bible*.

Annual Retreat, continued from previous page.



Oblates enjoyed Abbot John's four conferences and discussions (Q & A), as well as his company at shared meals and conversation, liturgy and ceremonies. Evaluations of the entire retreat were superlatively positive.



Addressing the topic "Prayer in the Life of an Oblate," Abbot John spoke on God language, praying the psalms, silence, and fidelity. CDs of the conferences are available from the oblate office at \$14 per set, including postage and handling.



At the retreat banquet, the animated and animating monk in the center is Br. David Paul Lange, OSB, who will direct the 2015 retreat July 17-19. Registrations online or by mail will open in late May or early June.

## More Recent Oblations

There is a wonderful and ever-growing interest in oblate life at Saint John's Abbey. Many people who come to know Saint John's through the Abbey Guesthouse, the Collegeville Institute, our schools, or from other oblates, are seeking to affiliate their lives more closely with the Benedictine rhythms of prayer, spiritual reading, hospitality, and community mindfulness. We currently have 35 seekers in our yearlong Benedictine formation program as oblate candidates.

As noted on page 6, six candidates made their oblation at Evening Prayer on Saturday during the annual retreat. Pictured below are other candidates, who for a variety of reasons, made oblation at other times.



**Diane Schmerler**, Hopkins MN, made her oblation on July 1, just days before her 66th birthday, with her daughter Viviana attending. Oblate Mary Fran Karanikolas, pastoral minister at the Church of St. Gabriel the Archangel, Hopkins, presided. Mary Fran regularly brings Holy Communion, reads the *Rule*, and prays with Diane, a former educator for St. Paul Schools and a travel & antique enthusiast, who is now battling ALS.



**Carmen Maier**, of Calgary Alberta, was joined by friends and oblates on September 13 for her oblation. Carmen graduated from Saint John's School of Theology in 2000 and was a resident scholar at Saint John's Collegeville Institute 2010-11. She received her doctorate in church history from Princeton Theological Seminary in 2012. Her teaching interests include Christian History, Theology, and Spirituality; Early Christian Spiritual Practices; Greek and Syriac Christianity throughout History; and Monasticism.



**Rachel Wheeler** made her oblation on July 20, witnessed by Fr. Andrew Colnaghi, prior of Incarnation Camaldolese Monastery in Berkeley, California. An alum of Saint John's School of Theology, Rachel is currently studying for her doctorate at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley.



**Joseph Prostrollo** is pictured at the altar in the abbey's St. Benedict chapel. With Fathers Don and Michael as witnesses, he signs his certificate of oblation on September 27. Joe is a retired producer for CBS news and is currently in his second year as a faculty resident in Saint John's University. He is the creator and administrator of the web podcast *The Benedictine Hour*, [www.thebenedictinehour.org](http://www.thebenedictinehour.org).



## Book Review

Brendan Collins, OBlSB

**Christine Valters Paintner.** *Eyes of the Heart: Photography as a Christian Contemplative Practice* (Notre Dame, Sorin Books, 2013).

When Christine Paintner became a Benedictine oblate at St. Placid Priory in Lacey, Washington, she made a commitment to deepen her contemplative path. She had been an avid photographer since she was a young girl but it wasn't until she embraced monastic spirituality that she approached photography as a contemplative practice. This book describes the shift that occurred when her photography became not just an art form but a spiritual practice that combines "the active art of receiving images with the contemplative nature and open-heartedness of prayer." Its eight chapters include specific tools and exercises, including:



—A comparison between *Lectio Divina* and *Visio Divina*—sacred seeing as an analogue of sacred reading, seeing the world itself as a sacred text.

—Contemplative walking, where the goal is not primarily to find something beautiful to photograph but to be present to life as it is and then to photograph it.

—Receiving images, not "taking" them, and the wisdom to see everyday things with the eyes of the heart.

—Shadow work, facing what is strange and what we want to reject in the world and in our selves. The beauty in imperfection.

—Reframing, learning how to shift perspective, to see things and our life in unexpected ways.

—The spiritual significance of color, including a wonderful description of Hildegard of Bingen's "greenness, God's love, energizing the world, and making it living and fruitful."

Paintner has degrees in philosophy and systematic theology, and also a doctorate in Christian spirituality from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. She wears her learning lightly—another Benedictine virtue. I found her a wise and grounded guide to a more contemplative life through photography.

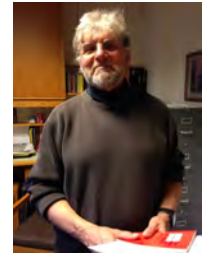
**Oblates:** *What helpful reading can you recommend to our oblate community? Send the title and the reason you like it to the oblate office: [oblates@osb.org](mailto:oblates@osb.org) (Editor)*

## Pondering Peace

Candidate Brian Hirt

"Let peace be your quest and your aim" (RB: Prol 17).

In pondering peace, I am in awe of the *Rule* and its implications for our daily lives. The *Rule* is a map to the treasure. It instructs and guides us to peace with God on a personal level, in community, and the much larger world community. "Peace" is a Benedictine motto and, in fact, I think it is *the* Benedictine motto, along with work and prayer. This Benedictine value, goal, invitation, this something to strive for is, at the same time, so simple and yet so difficult at times, so huge and so right. The early chapters of the *Rule* deal with being at peace with one's self and with God, and the later chapters with peace in community. It is a topic far too huge and broad for me to do it justice in this short reflection.



Let me start at the ground level—peace with one's self and peace with God. Can these really be separate? There are lots of tools to get there. Benedict points out humility, prayer, work, silence, hospitality, obedience, stability, community and more. Perhaps the key is to make myself empty so there is space for my "higher self." For me it is contemplative prayer that can point the way as well. I am talking about opening my heart at its deepest core to the presence of God.

Being at peace with God requires being at peace with myself as well. Peace recognizes that I am loved as I am, faults included. It involves repentance, trust, openness and grace. It recognizes the Divine in each moment.

There are clues from scripture pointing to peace. "Not my will, but Thine be done." "In you we live and move and have our being." "Let the peace of Christ control your hearts..." "Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, 'Peace be with you.'" In this peace there are no barriers, worry, fear, or anxiety.

I am reminded of Psalm 130 and the image of a content and satisfied child:

A weaned child on its mother's breast,  
Even so is my soul.  
O Israel, hope in the Lord  
Both now and forever.

This image describes living in grace and peace and light. In verse 19 of the prologue Benedict says, "What can be sweeter to us, dear brothers, than this voice of the Lord inviting us?" Yet, on this path inviting me, I may not be self-serving or self-indulgent. This peace, this relationship with God, is not meant as an end in itself for me alone. It requires a lifelong commitment and challenge to bring this peace into community and into the world, where it really comes to fruition. A daunting task to be sure, but do-able in each moment with a conscious assent.

## Benedictine Balance: The Tools for Good Works

Rev. Richard F. Collman, ObISB



I was struck recently by reading "Painting the Roses Red," an editorial in the September 9 issue of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* by

Presbyterian pastor Gordon C. Stewart from Chaska. He recounts hearing a ghastly reading from 2 Sam 4:9-13 in daily prayer at Saint John's Abbey and asking his Benedictine spiritual guide there why this passage was chosen. He was told that such sordid stories are lifted up in Benedictine daily worship because that capacity for violence and brutality is a part of us still. We must never forget this as we confront the stories and pictures of the ISIL beheadings and other atrocities in our world.

The presence of evil cannot be denied; neither can the presence of love and grace. Evil and good remain mixed up from the turbulent times of St. Benedict through our times. But in such circumstances, I am reminded of the balance of the *Rule* and the balance of living encouraged in the Benedictine way.

As an oblate I have been redirected time and again back to Chapter 4 of the *Rule*, "The Tools for Good Works." Soaked in Scripture, this chapter begins with the Great Commandment followed by references to the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule, Discipline, and Matthew 25:36 (clothe the naked, visit the sick). And that's just the beginning!

I come from a tradition of reformers and protestors (Protestants), specifically two brothers who did the good works of the *Rule*, knowingly or unknowingly, because their Anglican church was not doing so in 18th century England. The Wesley brothers, John and Charles, worked to recover the basics of the faith in their own

church that was not ministering well in that gin ridden age. Like Francis or Martin Luther or many other reformers, the Wesleys set about using "the tools of the spiritual craft". In spite of themselves, they created a movement called "Methodists" (for their methodical ways) that became a world denomination and the faith into which I was born. John Wesley preached prevenient grace, God's love that goes before us even when we are not aware of it. Charles wrote over 9,000 hymn poems to sing such doctrines and serve the lower classes of England untouched by the official church. So I have little trouble reading the works of John or the hymns of Charles right along with the *Rule* of St. Benedict — all are about balance in faith, love, and works.

Chapter 4 of the *Rule* reminds us that "Your way of acting should be different from the world's way; the love of Christ must come before all else." Precisely. What a great reminder from Benedict that our faith is basically countercultural in a time that desperately needs more loving and compassionate alternatives.

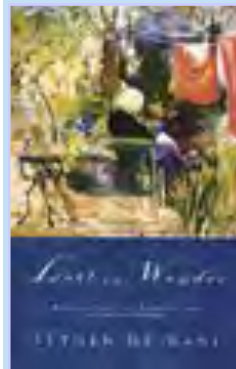
Esther de Waal, another oblate across the pond in England, has written a beautiful personal retreat book called *Lost in Wonder: Rediscovering the Spiritual Art of Attentiveness* (Liturgical Press, 2003). I highly recommend this book as a guide for exercising Chapter 4 in our lives.

As I attempt to live my life as an oblate and ecumenical Christian, I need the tools of Chapter 4 to help me get up when I keep falling down; to dethrone my ravenous ego with its demands; to remind me not to grumble or speak ill of others; to remind me daily that I am going to die; and finally, "to never lose hope in God's mercy." The tools are only that - methods by which to become more loving toward God and neighbor. Or, in the words of our oblate prayer: "May we be models in our homes, neighbor-

hoods, and communities of wise stewardship, dignified human labor, sacred leisure, and reverence for all living things."

*Rev. Richard F. Collman made oblation on August 26, 2000 at Blue Cloud Abbey, Marvin SD and transferred to Saint John's when Blue Cloud closed. He is retired in Northfield MN, where he remains active as a church musician and arts entrepreneur. He also plays Celtic harp for Hospice patients.*

### **Lost in Wonder: Rediscovering the Spiritual Art of Attentiveness** (Liturgical Press, 2003).



In *Lost in Wonder*, Esther de Waal uses the everyday circumstances of our lives — the restrictions and frustrations as well as the gifts and opportunities — as our

own way to God. By teaching us how to be attentive to all the seemingly small and insignificant things, she shows how they become windows through which the light of Christ can shine to dispel darkness, illuminate our understanding, and speak to our deepest needs. As we recover the gift of childlike wonder we begin to see that spiritual fruitfulness does not depend on our anxious performance, but is a gift we may receive freely. Waal takes us on a retreat to savor the beauties and the bounties of attention, silence, and wonder.

*Esther de Waal is an Anglican lay woman, married with four sons and a number of grandchildren. She lives on the Welsh Borders where she grew up and spends her time gardening, writing, traveling, and taking retreats. She became interested in Benedictine monasticism as a result of living for ten years in Canterbury. de Waal has written widely on the Rule of St. Benedict, including the bestseller Seeking God, and A Life-Giving Way, published by Liturgical Press.*



## Rule of Saint Benedict: Chapters 39 and 40

Saint Benedict is a practical man. He knows that even simple things like food and drink are important matters in community. While people have different needs as related to food and drink, we all have one great need – to have a higher purpose in life. The underlying motivation of our life is important. Often we do things because we want to be happy. Simply happy. But what is true happiness? The spiritual masters of many traditions have recognized two types of happiness: pleasure and higher purpose. *Pleasure*: this type of happiness is about always chasing the next pleasurable distraction. This happiness can often be good, but it is a difficult type of happiness to maintain because it is very temporary by nature. I love my morning coffee, but when the coffee cup is empty, that pleasure ends. Pleasure comes and pleasure goes. *Higher Purpose*: this is about being connected to something bigger and greater than yourself that has lasting meaning to you.

One interesting feature about these two is their varying sustainability. The happiness that arises from pleasure is highly unsustainable. Once the pleasurable stimulus ceases, then your happiness returns to your default position. Happiness arising from higher purpose, in contrast, is highly sustainable and the most gratifying. This form of happiness is very resilient and can last for a very long time, especially if that higher purpose has an altruistic and selfless origin.

Interestingly, we instinctively chase after pleasure, believing it to be the source of sustainable happiness. Many of us spend most of our time and energy chasing pleasure and once in a while we think about higher purpose. We should be doing precisely the reverse. Christian author C.S. Lewis wrote, “Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires, not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with trivia when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

Therefore, we should be spending most of our time and energy working on higher purpose. This is the wisest path toward sustainable happiness, at least in relation to our life. This insight also suggests the best way to find lasting happiness in life is to discover our own higher purpose. So often this is to be found in our relationships with other people. Higher purpose is often simple and uncomplicated.

In a great market in Mexico City an old man named Jose had 20 strings of onions hanging for sale. An American tourist asked him, “How much for a string of onions?” He said, “10 cents.” “How much for two strings?” “20 cents.” “How much for all 20 strings?”

Jose said, “I will not sell you all my 20 strings.” “Why not?” said the American, “Aren’t you here to sell your onions?” “No,” he said. “I am not here to sell all my onions. I’m here to live my life. I love this market place. I love the crowds, I love the sunlight. I love to have friends come by and say ‘Buenos Dias’ and talk about the babies and the crops. This is my life. For that I sit here all day and sell my 20 strings of onions. But if I sell all my onions to one customer, then my day is ended and I have lost my life I love and that I will not do.”

We welcome the many pleasures of food and drink as gifts from God. But Romans 14:17 is clear, “The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” The preoccupation with the things that, however good, will still pass away is not the primary concern for those dedicated to the Benedictine way of life. If I spend my days on passing things, then I am living a shallow life. When a man first enters our monastic community he is asked, “What do you seek?” I believe this question is asking the newcomer if he has a notion of his higher purpose. His liturgical response is, “I seek the mercy of God and fellowship in this community.” As monks and oblates, let us live our higher purpose with one another each day of our lives.

Blessings, Fr. Michael Peterson, OSB  
Oblate Director

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**Mark Your Calendar — 2014-2015**

**November 16, 2014: Fall/Advent Day of Reflection**

**January 17, 2015: Advisory Committee Retreat**

**March 15, 2015: Lenten Day of Reflection**

**July 17-19, 2015: Annual Oblate Retreat**

**November 15, 2015: Fall/Advent Day of Reflection**

**Regular Chapter Meetings** at Collegeville, Red River Valley (Fargo), Joan of Arc (Minneapolis), Basilica of Saint Mary (Minneapolis), and St. Paul Oblates. See website for details:  
[www.saintjohnsabbey.org/monastic-life/oblates/reg/](http://www.saintjohnsabbey.org/monastic-life/oblates/reg/)



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