



The Oblate

News Magazine of the Oblates of Saint John's Abbey

February 2022

Volume 66 Number 1

Lenten Day of Reflection: March 20

Fr. Cyril Gorman, OSB, entered Saint John's Abbey in 1984. He studied theology and spiritual direction at Saint John's University's School of Theology, library science at the University of Pittsburgh, and more theology at the University of Notre Dame, earning a PhD.



He has served as an associate pastor (Diocese of Crookston), as a librarian (Saint John's University), as an editor (Liturgical Press) and as an assistant

guestmaster here at Saint John's.

From 2006 to 2016, Father Cyril served in Japan as a member of Saint John's daughter community, Trinity Benedictine Monastery, Fujimi, Nagano Prefecture. Cyril spent a number of years as chaplain at Nasu Trappist Abbey, Nasu, Tochigi Prefecture. In 2018, Cyril returned to guest ministry, this time at the Abbey Guesthouse, where he also offers assistance to the Spiritual Life Program.

He also provides weekend assistance for liturgy of the Eucharist in several locales.

Kindness in the Rule of Benedict

Benedict was surely aware that kindness is fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Galatian 5:22). How does Benedict see the spirit of kindness working for those pursuing monastic values? What does that kindness look like for a beginner (comparable to a novice), for experienced persons (such as those sent to the troubled), or among those with special responsibilities (comparable to an abbot or cellarer)? Father Cyril believes that kindness is closely related to the good zeal that monastics are to have (RB 72), and he looks forward to speaking with and hearing from oblates about their understanding and experience of kindness.

Schedule for the Day

9:30 Arrive in Great Hall for fellowship

10:30 Eucharist in Abbey Church

11:45 Lunch in Quad 264

12:30 Group *Lectio Divina*

1:30 Conference followed by discussion

2:50 Blessing and Dismissal

We plan to meet in-person and virtually. The Zoom link for the conference will be provided to all the oblates with e-mail a few days before the Day of Reflection. There is no fee but a free will offering is appreciated. To register, inform oblate office you plan to attend.

Message from Abbot John Klassen



We are prophets of a future not our own.

This is a time of uncertainty, a time of searching for the right path into the future. In the past two years of living with COVID, we have time and again been fooled by

promises that we are finally emerging into “normalcy,” only to discover variants. Now is a time for patience, resilience, faith, kindness, and looking out for each other. I recently heard this poetic prayer composed by then Father Ken Untener, a priest of the Saginaw, MI diocese. For me, it expresses well the way I understand my life as a monk and a Christian who longs for the coming of the reign of God. I hope you find it to be helpful to you.

It helps, now and then, to step back and take a long view.

The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is a way of saying that the Kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.

No prayer fully expresses our faith.

No confession brings perfection.

No pastoral visit brings wholeness.

No program accomplishes the Church's mission.

No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that one day will grow.

We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise.

We lay foundations that will need further development.

We provide yeast that produces far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that.

This enables us to do something, and to do it very well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest.

We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers, not master builders; ministers, not messiahs.

We are prophets of a future not our own.



Message from Father Michael Peterson



“Beloved, let no one have contempt for your youth” (1 Tim 4:12). That’s what a middle-aged Saint Paul wrote to Timothy. Timothy was younger. How young -- a teen, a young adult? Whatever the case, he

was a strong and vibrant person in the early church. Young people don’t get listened to very often. We older folks may think the young are simply too inexperienced to have a voice in important decision making.

In the *Rule*, we find a different perspective. In chapter three entitled, “Summoning the Brothers for Council” Benedict writes, “All should be called for counsel because the Lord often reveals to the younger what is better.” Wow! Benedict knows that the younger in his community have new ideas, new ways of seeing things.

Sure, those of us who are older do have experience, but we can get stuck in a “this is the way we’ve always done it” mentality. For instance, global warming. Our abuse of creation doesn’t work anymore and it’s young people who are demanding change with the strongest voice!

Addressing 2.5 million people in Poland during World Youth Day, Pope Francis offered these powerful words. “My young friends, Jesus is the Lord of risk. Jesus is not the Lord of comfort, security, and ease. Following Jesus demands a good dose of courage, a readiness to trade in the sofa for a pair of walking shoes and to set out on new and uncharted paths, to take the path of the craziness of God.”

If young people say something crazy, something new, maybe we should listen to them!

From the Editor

I was introduced to Thich Nhất Hạnh's work years ago and chose his book *The Miracle of Mindfulness* as my favorite. Our culture often prefers “multi-tasking” to disciplined focus on the present moment and place. Nevertheless, trying to practice mindfulness as taught by Thich Nhất Hạnh is a genuine spiritual experience. Mindfulness, as taught by him, is not the same as Centering Prayer but not entirely foreign either. We may find them complementary.

This Vietnamese Buddhist monk and teacher was forced into exile in the 1960s. He lived and taught overseas, mostly in France but, in fact, globally. For more than five decades he spoke out for nonviolence as a way of life while he taught his mindfulness meditation practices.

On January 22 he died at the age of 95 at Từ Hiếu Pagoda, the Buddhist temple in Hue, Vietnam, where he entered monastic life at the age of 16 and returned to prepare for his death in 2019.

Nhất Hạnh's mindfulness teaches that one generates energy when bringing the mind back to the body, getting in touch with the present moment. It requires breath awareness and focusing on what is going on around you. Through this focusing and by slowing down one's state of mind, awareness is deepened and healing takes place.

He invited practitioners to employ mindfulness throughout the day, while doing the simplest of tasks: brushing one's teeth, washing dishes, walking, eating, speaking or listening. Mindful eating might require chewing each morsel of food for a minute or more, focusing on the source of the food and the meaning of the act. We might all benefit from practicing what I believe is a special spiritual art: being mindful always and wherever we are.

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Conversion of Heart

At the heart of the monastic person's life is the promise of conversion. It is one of the three vows Benedict asks of the monk in his *Rule*: stability, conversion (aka *fidelity to monastic life*), and obedience. Conversion is at the root of things! It is a promise to keep trying, an explicit commitment to trust God enough to keep turning to God and turning away from anything that would make us ashamed of the Gospel. In many ways, then, conversion of heart is a rejection of living in the past. It is a willingness to let things go, to let the future happen, to keep growing by responding to God's abiding faithfulness to us.

This means, of course, that conversion is closely linked to faith. It helps us carry out the decision we spoke of before, to follow Christ: in the spirit of the Gospel, living out our baptism. We tend to think of faith as a matter of the mind: an intellectual assent to truths the Church presents to us. But that is only one aspect of faith. Faith, in the biblical sense, is really a surrender of ourselves to a person, the person Christ, who shows us the Father. Faith is a relationship.

In his closing words at World Youth Day in Madrid, Pope Benedict XVI said that "Faith is more than just empirical or historical facts; it is an ability to grasp the mystery of Christ's person in all its depth." By choosing to be an oblate, one is choosing a certain set of values that put a priority in one's life on deepening this relationship with God, developing a more personal relationship with Jesus Christ. This is what conversion means: a change of direction, a turning, a continuous turning and returning to God.

Think of the famous scriptural parable of the Prodigal Son. The Father was out daily, waiting, longing,

Sister Dolores Dowling, OSB

looking for this beloved son to return to his home. Finally, the son came to his senses and set out on this homeward journey. It was not that he needed to ask for forgiveness: he was already forgiven, always forgiven. He just needed to turn to his father. It is the same with us. We are never not forgiven. We just need to realize this and open ourselves to the welcome that awaits us. Probably one of the reasons Ben-

edict stresses humility so much is that he realized it would be needed for any genuine conversion of our hearts, because genuine conversion is going to conflict, time and time again, with our human desire to be self-sufficient. We said that conversion means entrusting ourselves to God, and this means opening ourselves to the unknown, realizing that we must be open to the possibility of change, realizing that God can ask any-

thing. And this frightens us. We would feel better if it meant obeying rules, rules that we knew and could total up, like a supermarket tally. But conversion is, instead, a free personal response to God who speaks to us in the challenges of human events and persons.

A good example of what conversion can mean is what happened in the Catholic Church after the Second Vatican Council. A great many people had been very comfortable with the Church they had always known. Then it began to change, and some panicked. But the spirit of conversion means a willingness not to cling to customs, regulations, and signs that have for a time been bearers of God's grace to us. When God asks us to move on, we have to be ready.

Think of Saint Paul's words: "Forgetting what is behind me and straining for what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize which is God's call to the life above, in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13ff). We can



move on like this if we rely not on our own pitiful strength but on God's fidelity. God has never broken a promise.

Saint Benedict has what he calls "twelve degrees of humility" (RB 7). Translating these into more familiar concepts can be a help toward understanding what conversion involves. Conversion means the effort at awareness: keeping in touch with the God-dimension of our lives, not letting this get swamped by other things. It means restraint: trying to overcome those little addictions that beset us; looking squarely at our compulsiveness to see where this interferes with our relationship to God and to others.

Conversion involves the ongoing struggle with our self-centeredness. This is the Easter struggle: to die a little more to our vanity and desire to be first and

surrender more of ourselves to God. It also involves patience: being willing to wait, not to judge too quickly, accepting things we cannot change. Conversion means openness, freeing up some of our self-protecting energy to reach out to others. It means working for self-knowledge: stripping away, layer by layer, those illusions that keep us from the real.

Conversion involves trying to overcome competitiveness: not defining ourselves by comparison with others, not making our worth depend on what we have.

It involves, too, the effort at stillness: stopping the outer and inner chatter that betrays our fear of silence. Benedict says that as we do this, we shall begin to run on the "way of God's commandments." We shall be turned ever more to God and God to us.



Every day Pat Marrin provides Pencil Preaching, a publication of *National Catholic Reporter*. He normally adds an appropriate sketch for the Scripture passage he comments on in Pencil Preaching. Twice weekly Pat contributes his *Francis comic strip*. Subscription to his column is free but your editor encourages oblates to subscribe to and support NCR. Go to www.ncronline.org/columns/pencil-preaching. Below is from Conversion of St. Paul, Jan. 25.

The conversion of St. Paul is important not only for our understanding of Paul but also for an understanding of our own Christian discipleship. Paul's encounter with the crucified and risen Jesus defined his life from that moment on. The purpose of his existence and the key to his human maturity and divine destiny was union with the dying and rising of Jesus the Christ.

Paul called this experience of union with Jesus the "Paschal Mystery," our share in the new Passover from sin and death to new life accomplished by Jesus. By living in Christ and for Christ, Paul was being transformed, dying to his former self in order to rise to his authentic self, a new creation in Christ.

By baptism every Christian takes up this same pattern of dying to self in order to live with Christ. By sharing the Eucharist, we nourish this

new life as members of the body of Christ. What Jesus accomplished once and for all is now extended in time and space as the redemption of the world, humanity and all of creation.

Paul's ministry was about sharing this mystery through his preaching and the establishment of faith communities across Asia Minor, with a special appeal to the Gentiles. What was prefigured by the first covenant under the Law for the Jews was now a new covenant of Grace offered universally.

Membership in Christ and transformation through the Paschal Mystery are the ultimate purpose of our lives and the goal of history. We celebrate the conversion of St. Paul to remind ourselves that life in Christ is meant to be the conscious, deliberate focus of our lives. The heart of our discipleship is to fulfill Paul's prayer, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."

Father Don's Daily Reflection

Every day Fr. Don Talafous, OSB writes a reflection which is posted online. www.saintjohnsabbey.org/reflection

Mahatma Gandhi was asked once what he considered to be the essential teaching of Hinduism. He replied in words from a Hindu sacred book, the *Isha Upanishad*: "All this that we see in this great universe is permeated by God. Renounce it and enjoy it." Now, don't run away! I think there's something quite intelligible to all of us here and I hope to make that clear!

Let me paraphrase the verse Gandhi quoted.

All that we see around us in this great universe is filled with and penetrated by God. Let go of it; don't hold on to it possessively and then, enjoy it, appreciate it. More: the universe, all that is, belongs to and comes from God; God lives in it, in every part of it. It is not ours but it is definitely given to us to use and enjoy.

We enjoy it best by not seeking to take any part

of it and make it our own private possession but by seeing it for its value, beauty, purpose and approaching it accordingly. By letting go of it, by 'renouncing' it, we try to let it be what it is as it comes from the hand of God.

That means that all that is has a meaning and value apart from what I think it could be for me and I should try to see this. Letting go and enjoying is a bit like what parents must do with their grown children: be willing to let them be what they are or will become and then, be able to appreciate the uniqueness that follows.



Milestones

◆ Candidates

Bryan Biba from Asherville, NC. October 21, 2021

Jayan Koshy from St. Paul, MN. October 26, 2021

Rodger Narlock from Cold Spring, MN. November 11, 2021

◆ Oblations



Father Michael with Ben Hansberry, his wife, mom and dad at oblation on December 21, 2021



Photo credit: Oblate Jane Rodeheffer

At right Father Michael receives the final oblation of Michael Hensley (St. Paul, MN), Lanny Law (Annandale, MN), Ivan Maldonado (Stratford, WI), and Gail Johnson (Fergus Falls, MN). This took place during the Day of Reflection on November 21, 2021. Welcome all!

◆ Deaths

Minh Griffiths, age 47, son of **Oblates Maryellen and Bill Griffiths**, October 17, 2021

Dorothy Keane, age 99, mother of **Oblate Kevin Keane**, October 25, 2021

Deacon Michael Keable, ObISB, November 20, 2021

Ann "Alice" Gallivan, ObISB, December 13, 2021

James Mann Wallace, husband of **Oblate Catherine Senne Wallace**, December 24, 2021

George Hawkins, father of **Oblate Mark Hawkins**, January 16, 2022

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.

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.

Yoga Relates to Oblate Life

Pam Keul, OblSB

In 1993 I was a wife, mother of four young children, part-time local newspaper reporter, a volunteer at our church in Saint Paul, Minnesota — and oh, my aching back. I was spending a lot of time lying on a heating pad, and dreaded getting into my car. Sitting on a chair at a meeting was no fun.

“Why don’t you come to our yoga class?” a friend asked me. That question pointed me in a new direction, away from being parked in suffering. For some months I went to class once a week, and my back felt better. Every so often I would do something simple, such as making the bed, wiping out my progress.

Next my husband, Tom Keul, was done with school, and we were moving from St. Paul to Cannon Falls, MN. When we got there I started driving an hour to yoga class and back. I wondered, “No yoga in Cannon Falls. Should I become a yoga teacher?”

Forty-five years old, with back pain and having never been athletic, I registered to eat vegetarian food and spend a month in a pup-tent in Grass Valley, CA in order to earn a certification to teach Sivananda yoga.

In the months after registering I added a twice weekly home practice to my once weekly yoga class.

Practicing Asana, the postures, three times a week was a turning point for me. Since then, for 29 years, back pain is part of my history, but not my present, and hopefully not my future.

Home from Grass Valley and certified to teach yoga, I approached Community Education in Cannon Falls. “People in our city would never

stand for yoga being taught through Community Ed.,” I was told by one of the local Community Ed. Board members. A group from the Catholic church our family attended started praying for my soul (recently Tom said, “I hope they’re still praying for you.”).

Yoga was thought to be from the evil East, not the chosen and blessed Christian West. The minister at First Congregational Church in Cannon Falls kindly took me in, and I taught there for five years, until Tom contracted a virus that attacked his heart. After he was released from the hospital and slept for a month, he decided it would be best if he quit commuting to Minneapolis, and we moved to Roseville, next to Minneapolis.

By then I had discovered Viniyoga, which has a strong focus on safety and adapts to the needs of the individual. I quit teaching yoga myself, and took as many Viniyoga classes as I could as a student, until 2016 when I enrolled in a Viniyoga teacher training in Watsonville, CA. It was a lot of work, but also fun! When I finished that, I entered the Viniyoga therapy training program in Austin, TX. With considerable whining on my part over the science (no one has ever called me a scientist), and sheer volume of learning required, leaving little room for laughs, I am now a certified Viniyoga therapist.



At least 1,700 years ago, wise sage Patanjali compiled the Yoga Sutras, four chapters on the state of yoga, Samadhi, connection with the Divine, and the practices that can help us get there. Ishvara is a Sanskrit word for God. Prānīdhana means to devote or surrender. Ishvara prānīdhana means to direct ourselves away from our small selves, who

want to call the shots, to guidance by and service to the Divine, which brings peace and great possibilities beyond our imaginations.



Practicing yoga and also being a member of the Saint John's oblate community of pilgrims stumbling toward heaven? It works for me.

Max Johnson, ObISB, 2021–2022 Berakah Award Recipient from NAAL

Thanks to Peter Dwyer, director of Liturgical Press, we learn that Reverend Maxwell E. Johnson, ObISB, author of numerous books including his latest *Introduction to Eastern Christian Liturgies*, co-authored with Stefanos Alexopoulos, was recently recognized by the North American

Academy of Liturgy (NAAL) with the prestigious Berakah Award for 2021-2022. The Berakah Award honors a person who has made outstanding contributions in the field of liturgy and is awarded annually.



Max Johnson is an ordained Lutheran, pictured here presenting his acceptance speech at NAAL 2022. After teaching in our School of Theology-

Seminary for a number of years, Max moved on to Notre Dame where he teaches now. Congratulations Max Johnson, Saint John's oblate!

Theology Day

BENEDICTINE ROOTS IN AN EVER-CHANGING WORLD

Theology Day is a chance for people in our communities who are seeking a deeper understanding of their faith and its place in their everyday lives to learn from and interact with the theologians of Saint John's School of Theology and Seminary. It offers a chance for these scholars to gain insights and grow in their faith, as well.



Exploring the Journey of Becoming: A Look at the Relationship of Faith and Imagination

Presenter: Larry Fraher, PhD

Often relegated to the realm of childhood and fantasy, the imagination gets a bad rap. The last thought most may consider is the impact of the imagination upon the experience of faith. But there are great connections to be discovered. This Theology Day will examine these connections and explore thought about the imagination and its role in the human experience of faith, the relationship of Christ to each of us and to all of us, and how, by employing the imagination, we engage the journey of becoming.



Apples and Oranges? An Interreligious Approach to Loving God and Neighbor

In-person Event | **Presenter: Chris Conway, PhD**

The reality of religious pluralism—that there are many religions, that many good and sincere people practice these many religions, and that these many religions will remain many—invites us to grow in our love for God and neighbor by encountering what is true, good, and holy in these traditions. But where and how do we begin this interreligious learning? With examples from Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism, we will explore the possibilities religious pluralism and comparative theology provide.



The Garden of Eden and the Human Condition: Nostalgia or Anticipation?

In-person Event | **Presenter: Fr. Michael Patella, OSB**

The story of Adam and Eve, originating over two-and-a-half millennia ago, arose at a time when the anthropological worldview was vastly different from our own. While we now stand under the light of the Big Bang Theory and evolutionary biology, this Genesis account of the human condition is still the basis for Christian salvation history. Prompted by the results of scientific discovery, Fr Michael Patella will explore the questions science raises for our concept of sin as well as pose an alternative framework for twenty-first century Christians to employ in their thinking about redemption.

For dates and times, and to register: [Theology Day Registration – School of Theology and Seminary \(csbsju.edu\)](https://csbsju.edu/theology-day-registration)

Pope Francis on Meditation

Following is part of a recent talk by Pope Francis that can easily relate to our Benedictine practice of lectio divina.

We are not made for rushing all the time; we have an inner life that cannot always be trampled on. Meditating is therefore a need for everyone. Meditating, so to speak, is like stopping and taking a breath in life.

We realize that this word of Scripture, once accepted in a Christian context, takes on a uniqueness that must not be eradicated. Meditating is a necessary human dimension, but meditating in the Christian context goes further: it is a dimension that must not be eradicated.

The great door through which the prayer of a baptized person passes is Jesus Christ. For the Christian, meditation enters through the door of Jesus Christ. And when Christians pray, they do not aspire to full self-transparency, they do not seek the deepest center of the ego. This is legitimate, but the Christian seeks something else. The prayer of the Christian is first of all an encounter with the Other, with a capital "O": the transcendent encounter with God.

If an experience of prayer gives us inner peace, or self-mastery, or clarity about the path to take, these results are, so to speak, side effects of the grace of Christian prayer, which is the encounter with Jesus. That is, meditating means going to the encounter with Jesus, guided by a phrase or a word from Holy Scripture.

Here, then, is the grace of Christian prayer:

Christ is not far away but is always in a relationship with us. There is no aspect of his divine-human person that cannot become a place of salvation and happiness for us. Every moment



of Jesus' earthly life, through the grace of prayer, can become immediate to us, thanks to the Holy Spirit, the guide.

Thanks to the Holy Spirit, we too are present at the River Jordan when Jesus immerses himself to receive baptism. We too are guests at the wedding at Cana, when Jesus gives the best wine for the happiness of the couple.

That is, it is the Holy Spirit who connects us with these mysteries of the life of Christ because in contemplation of Jesus we experience prayer joining us more closely to him. We too are astonished onlookers of the thousands of healings performed by the Master. We take the Gospel, and meditate on those mysteries, and the Spirit guides us to being present there.

When we pray we are all like the cleansed leper, the blind Bartimaeus who regains his sight, Lazarus who comes out of the tomb.... We too are healed by prayer just as the blind Bartimaeus was healed, and the leper.... We too rise again, as Lazarus rose again, because prayer of meditation guided by the Holy Spirit leads us to relive these mysteries of the life of Christ and to encounter Christ, and to say with the blind man, "Lord, have pity on me!" — "And what do you want?" — "To see, to enter into that dialogue."

Christian meditation, led by the Spirit, leads us to this dialogue with Jesus. There is no page of the Gospel in which there is no place for us. For us Christians, meditating is a way to encounter Jesus. And in this way, only in this way, we rediscover ourselves. And this, thanks to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.





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THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD MAY BE GLORIFIED

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

SAINT JOHN'S ABBEY, BOX 2015, COLLEGEVILLE, MN 56321

FEBRUARY 2022

VOLUME 66, NUMBER 1

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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U.S. Postage
PAID
Collegeville, MN 56321

Mark Your Calendar

Until Covid-19 ends, these events will be accessible on Zoom unless otherwise indicated

March 20, 2022 Lenten Day of Reflection

July 15-17, 2022: Annual Oblate Retreat

First Saturday of Month: Oblate Formation



Hope Springs Eternal

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Layout: *Josie Stang*; **Printing and Mailing:** *Beth Lensing*; **Circulation:** *John Young*.

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