

The Oblate

News Magazine of the Oblates of Saint John's Abbey

February 2021

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At the request of Abbot John, Father Nathanael Hauser OSB embarked on the creation of a triptych whose central panel is of the Virgin and Child. Abbot John asked that the Virgin recall Our Lady of Guadalupe. The work is 8' high, hung directly above the abbot's throne in the Abbey Church, holding our gaze through the Advent and Christmas season.

Following are notes from Father Nathanael on his creative process of the Our Lady of Guadalupe icon:

I wanted to know as much as possible in a short time about the Guadalupe image, so I turned to Fr. Francisco Schulte OSB for help. My deep thanks to him for sharing the wealth of his knowledge about Our Lady of Guadalupe. There was much to learn!

My first thought in planning the piece was to adapt the icon of our Lady of the Sign, which is an Advent/Christmas icon. Then I thought of using the pose of the Mabon Madonna. But the more I looked at the image, the less either idea seemed to work.

The miraculous image is from 1531 and, the more I studied it, the more it became apparent that our Lady chose to depict herself in the pictorial style of the age. That makes sense: this was the way people expected to see a portrait, just as we expect to see a photograph. This was the style of the Italian Renaissance--Mary's face reminds me of some of Botticelli's paintings in particular. However, being an iconographer by training, my painting turned out to be more like an icon than a Botticelli!

During the persecutions of the 1920's-30's in Mexico, the image was hidden for five years to protect it from destruction. Unfortunately, during this time somebody decided to "touch up" the face and painted over it!

Message from Abbot John Klassen, OSB and Oblate Director Father Michael, OSB

To be made in God's image is to be made vulnerable.



We live on a tiny planet in a vast universe and we believe that a creating, redeeming God in our time and on our small planet sent Jesus Christ, the unique Son of God, the *Word* of God in the flesh, to be born of Mary. We believe that Jesus is the very face of

God on earth, embodying God's love for us. He lived, died and rose again so that we might live with a new heart, a new mind, and a new strength.

What does this newness look like? Lessons from COVID-19 may help us see.

1. Stop! Receive the day, a day we get to live just once, to receive its graces and its heartaches just once. To live as new people, we must be intentional and decide to live each day as a new day. Just once.

2. Stop! Recognize all human beings as persons. I used to resent TSA and other airport security. Then one day I realized that we ask them to do the impossible, for very little money. If I claim to be a disciple of Jesus, I must be sincerely kind and treat them with kindly zeal, respect and care, as Jesus would.

3. Stop! Recognize the unsurpassable value of childhood, a value that does not come from their future lives; it is intrinsic. A fundamental clue to understanding the reign of God, the child stands at the center of attention in the Gospels. Let the little children come to me, Jesus says, for the reign of God belongs to such as these (Lk 18.16).

Jesus is consistently inclusive, always choosing mercy over judgment. He chooses compassion over harsh law. Incarnation testifies that God is inclusiveness, mercy, and compassion. We are created in this very image, made to behave like God.

To live this way will inevitably show us how vulnerable we can be, made in God's own image. To be made in God's image is to be made vulnerable.

I make it a point to greet one of my brother monks most mornings -- Father Mel Taylor. Originally from Ireland, he speaks with a wonderful Irish brogue. When I greet him, he always starts by saying, "Good morning, child of God." I like that!



I'm taking up this practice too. When I see a Bennie or Johnnie walking around campus, and especially if they look a little down, I'll smile with my eyes (because of my mask), and say "Good morning, child of God."

And that person usually lights up a bit.

To be a daughter, a son, a child of God: what an amazing source for our personal identity. How we often view ourselves could just be limited to what we browse and consume on our screens, what we eat and drink, what we wear, what we purchase. This identity is superficial and fleeting in nature.

Jesus speaks about another identity, all the time, in the gospels. This identity is that each of us is infinitely loved as a child of God -- a woman who loses a coin and lights a lamp to find it; a shepherd who loses a sheep and roams about the countryside to find it; a father who loses a son and is always looking down the road for his son's return.

These stories aren't ultimately about things and people being lost; these stories are about things and people being found. The God that Jesus teaches us about doesn't give up until everything that was lost is found. This God simply doesn't give up. Ever.

If you're lost, you might say, "God, why do you care for me? I am not worth much." If you're a lost sheep, you may say, "Why do you care about me? You have 99 others. Leave me alone. I'm not worth searching for. Why are you searching for me?" Because, God says, "You are mine. You are mine. You belong to me, child of God!"

Oblate and Mayor

Her husband, Paul, held the Bible her father had received at his Confirmation in 1936. With her left hand on the Bible she raised her right hand for the Oath of Office, and Oblate **Bobbie Osterberg** is now also Mayor Osterberg of the City of Alexandria MN.

In her words: "It feels right and I'm comfortable in the role. The transition between the outgoing Mayor and me was uneventful. She was kind, patient, gracious and a good mentor. In December 2019 our Mayor had announced she would not run for re-election and I was expecting 2020 to be my last year in public service as a member of the City Council. "After a total of 10 years on the Council, running for Mayor was not even a consideration. It was time for other people to participate in the leadership of the community. And then came the message straight out of *lectio*: It is not right to refuse what you're called to do when you've been given the gifts to do the job.

"The last decades have been a layering on of professional and spiritual experiences and formation. The campaign was a not-to-be-missed spiritual journey. Everything was provided before I even knew it was needed. Not wanting nor worrying about anything. So good to let go and let God and see how the journey would end. While the campaign certainly had its

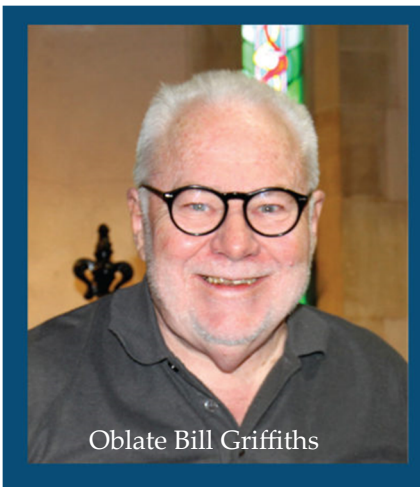
stressful moments, I felt a genuine peace throughout the eight months. Voter turnout was 80% with 64% of the voters approving my job application."

Bobbie expects that holding this position will be like that of the Cellarer of her community. She calls it the ICE guiding principle. Integrity-Commitment-Engagement. Her address to the community called upon all residents to consider the Lou Holtz and JFK abbreviated versions of Saint Benedict's Rule. "Do the right thing, do the best you can and always show people you care" and "Look beyond yourself." The Mayor and Council are nonpartisan. They are free to make the best decisions for the community.

Surely our oblate community will hold Mayor Bobbie in prayer as she serves the 14,000 members of her community during the next four years.



Knight of Saint Gregory



Oblate Bill Griffiths

Pope Francis has appointed Oblate Bill Griffiths as a Knight of the Order of Saint Gregory the Great. The Order of Saint Gregory the Great is one of the highest awards for lay people, bestowed on Catholic men

and women deemed to have made a significant contribution to the Catholic Church.

In 2008, the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference appointed Doctor Griffiths chief executive officer of the NCEC in Canberra. Returning to Adelaide in 2013 to retire, he has held a variety of leadership positions on parish, school and social service governance and management boards.

Doctor Griffiths' other major contribution to the life of the Church in Australia has been through liturgy and music. He chairs the National Liturgical Council and is on other boards as well.

Locally, he has been organist at St. Mary's Cathedral in Darwin and in the Cathedral Parish in Adelaide. A person of deep faith, Bill is an oblate of Saint John's Abbey and has attended numerous oblate retreats and events in Colledgeville over the years.

Candidates

Gail Johnson, Fergus Falls, MN, Nov. 18

Nick Cichowicz, St. Paul, MN, Dec. 23

Edward Ross, Midland, Ontario, Jan. 12

Oblations

Kathleen Cepelka, Whitefish Bay, WI, Nov. 15

Jane Hagerman, Milwaukee, WI, Nov. 17

Lenten Day of Reflection



On Sunday, March 21 at 12:30 pm, **Fr. Michael Kwatera OSB** will lead the Lenten Day of Reflection with a conference entitled *A Trio of Lenten Saints: Patrick, Joseph and Benedict*. He will tell us what makes them good Lenten saints. Father Michael

served as oblate director for nine years (2002-2011), continues as faculty resident in the university and as abbey liturgy director. He has done extensive study—and veneration—of saints, an interesting pursuit for a person with a doctorate in liturgy.

Because of Covid-19 the presentation is via Zoom (the link will be sent to your email shortly before the 21st). If we don't have your current email address, please send it to the director at oblates@csbsju.edu — Participants are invited and encouraged to “attend” the 10:30 Eucharist that is live-streamed every Sunday on www.saintjohnsabbey.org/live

Due to the at-home-on-Zoom nature of this event, lunch and *lectio* will be at home also.

Deaths

Don Schimmels, 101, died September 9, 2020, in Luxemburg, WI. He was our oldest oblate. Don had a passion for spreading his faith and for life-long learning, and he took classes through UWGB, the Green Bay Diocese and St. Norbert College until he was 100 years old.

Don Kercher, 82, Fargo, ND, September 28. His wife Patricia had died the previous June 20.

Oblates Minneapolis Chapter Meeting

Nicholas Tangen ObISB hosts a morning of communal prayer and silence (centering prayer) on the fourth Saturday of the month at 10:00 am. This too is on Zoom. Nicholas sends the link a few days before. Send him your email address if you would like to be added to his list.

nicholastangen@gmail.com



www.nicholastangen.com takes you to his website where, among other things, there is a link to his blog: “Writing About Social Transformation and the Church.” Check it out.

ANYWAY — Saint Teresa of Calcutta (aka Mother Teresa)

People are often unreasonable, illogical and self-centered;
Forgive them anyway.

If you are kind, people may accuse you of selfish, ulterior motives;
Be kind anyway.

If you are successful, you will win some false friends and some true enemies;
Succeed anyway.

If you are honest and frank, people may cheat you;
Be honest and frank anyway.

What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight;
Build anyway.

If you find serenity and happiness, they may be jealous;
Be happy anyway.

The good you do today, people will often forget tomorrow;
Do good anyway.

Give the world the best you have, and it may never be enough;
Give the world the best you've got anyway.

You see, in the final analysis it is between you and God;
It was never between you and them anyway.



If You But Trust In God To Guide You

If you but trust in God to guide you
and place your confidence in him,
he'll give you strength and stand beside you
when days are dreary, dark, and dim.
For those who trust his changeless love
build on the rock that does not move.

Sing, pray, and keep his ways unswerving,
perform your duties faithfully,
and trust his word; though undeserving,
you'll find his promise true to be.
God never yet forsook in need
the soul that trusted him indeed.

*(Tune & Text by Georg Neumark, Translation by
Catherine Witworth, tweaked by a group in 1978)*



Above: The icon of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mother of God and our mother, is seen here in its larger context. From Advent through the Baptism of the Lord, it rested above the abbot's throne, centered for our viewing. Members of the Liturgical Environment

The calligraphy in the trapezoid sections is in Nahuatel and is from the account of the appearance of our Lady to Juan Diego. In this section she speaks of her relationship to him. The first line is famous in Mexico. Thanks once again to Father Francisco for teaching me about this! The bottom circle of each panel has the Cross-in-a-Square that represents God. I thought it might lead one to think of the quotation as coming both from our Lady and from her Son.

I used only parts for the Spanish/English calligraphy because of space limitations. It simply looked too overcrowded when I tried to use it all. Also, I wanted something large enough to be easily legible from the nave. For me the phrase "The Source of Your Joy" stood out and seems appropriate for Christmas, so I decided to use that as the focal point of the calligraphy. The texts are the same in English and Spanish.





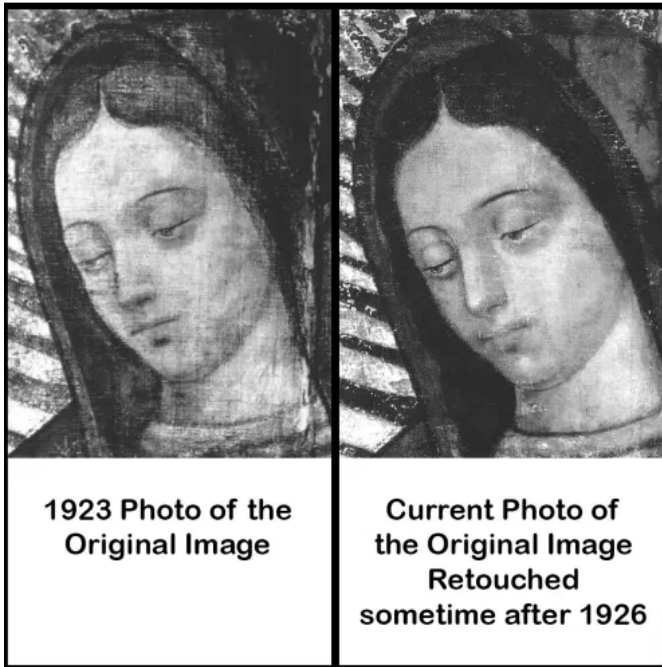
Committee hung and lighted the work. The kind of lighting on a painting can make or break it so the care in lighting it so well is also much appreciated. See below and also page 8 for notes from the triptych author, Fr. Nathanael Hauser, OSB.

- Am I not here, who am your mother?
- Are you not under my shadow and protection?
- Am I not the source of your joy?
- Are you not in the hollow of my mantle, the crossing of my arms?
- Do you need something more?
- ¿No estoy aquí, que soy tu madre?
- ¿No estás bajo mi sombra y resguardo?
- ¿No soy yo la fuente de tu alegría?
- ¿No estás en el hueco de mi manto, en el cruce de mis brazos?
- ¿Tienes necesidad de alguna otra cosa?



Guadalupe icon, continued from page 1:

That paint is already starting to fall off, while the original image remains untouched beneath it. This overpainting makes Mary appear older and disfigures her hair, which appears like a flat black shape. Happily, there are some good painted copies and two good photographs from before the re-painting. I used the 1923 black and white photo as my main reference. In that photo



she is clearly a beautiful young woman and her hair is lustrous. But since we are used to seeing the touched-up image, I also kept parts of that in painting her face.

For the pose of Jesus, I began with the pose of the icon of our Lady of the Sign in which Christ is shown half-length within a mandorla, and has both hands stretched out in blessing.

But as I was drawing different ideas, I thought of Grunewald's Resurrection (1515) and adopted aspects of that pose. I liked the idea that the Child Christ is alluding to the Resurrection with his outstretched arms and frontal pose.



The frontal pose is also important from a Mesoamerican viewpoint. In the Guadalupe image, Mary's head is bowed and in three-quarter view. This is interpreted from a Mesoamerican perspective to mean that she is indicating that she is not divine. It has always seemed to me that she is also bowing. This is the only way I can account for the shape of her shoulders. In that culture, a divine being would be shown full face and standing straight. So, Jesus' frontal pose would indicate his divinity to the indigenous culture. I wonder if Grunewald had that idea as well?

One of the authors I read says that it is impossible to take an accurate color photo of the original image because the color of her robe is iridescent. The colors shift between blues and greens depending on the angle of view, much like a peacock's feather. This is yet another indication of the miraculous nature of the image since that effect cannot be copied in paint. So I decided to go with turquoise for both figures, adding more of the blue to Mary's cloak and more of the green to Jesus's robe.

Mary is quite richly dressed in the original image: she wears a royal cloak with golden stars, an inner dress that can be seen at her wrists with golden lace at the cuffs, and over that a

rich dress with fur at the collar and cuffs and golden embroidery. It has always been noticed, however, that this embroidery does not follow the folds of the dress. One interpretation of this is that she is actually wearing a gauze overdress that is embroidered with the golden decorations.

To read Fr. Nathanael's full text go to:
<https://saintjohnsabbey.org/olg>

In Hope We Were Saved Excerpts of Encyclical “*Spe Salvi*” of Pope Benedict XVI

¶35. All serious and upright human conduct is hope in action. This is so first of all in the sense that we thereby strive to realize our lesser and greater hopes, to complete this or that task which is important for our onward journey, or we work towards a brighter and more humane world so as to open doors into the future.

Yet our daily efforts in pursuing our own lives and in working for the world’s future either tire us or turn into fanaticism, unless we are enlightened by the radiance of the great hope that cannot be destroyed even by small-scale failures or by a breakdown in matters of historic importance.

If we cannot hope for more than is effectively attainable at any given time, or more than is promised by political or economic authorities, our lives will soon be without hope.

It is important to know that I can always continue to hope, even if in my own life, or in the historical period in which I am living, there seems to be nothing left to hope for. Only the great certitude of hope that my own life and history in general, despite all failures, are held firm by the indestructible power of Love gives them their meaning and importance. Only this kind of hope can then give the courage to act and to persevere.

Certainly we cannot “build” the Kingdom of God by our own efforts—what we build will always be the kingdom of man with all the limitations proper to our human nature. The Kingdom of God is a gift, and precisely because of this, it is great and beautiful, and constitutes the response to our hope.

And we cannot—to use the classical expression—“merit” Heaven through our works. Heaven is always more than we could merit, just

as being loved is never something “merited” but always a gift. However, even when we are fully aware that Heaven far exceeds what we can merit, it will always be true that our behavior is not indifferent before God and therefore is not indifferent for the unfolding of history. We can open ourselves and the world and allow God to enter: we can open ourselves to truth, to love, to what is good.

This is what the saints did, those who, as “God’s fellow workers,” contributed to the world’s salvation (cf. *1 Cor* 3:9; *1 Th* 3:2). This makes sense even if outwardly we achieve nothing or seem powerless in the face of overwhelming hostile forces.

So on the one hand, our actions engender hope for us and for others; but at the same time, it is the great hope based upon God’s promises that gives us courage and directs our action in good times and bad.

¶36. Like action, suffering is a part of our human existence. Suffering stems partly from our finitude, and partly from the mass of sin which has accumulated over the course of history, and continues to grow unabated today. Certainly we must do whatever we can to reduce suffering: to avoid as far as possible the suffering of the innocent; to soothe pain; to give assistance in overcoming mental suffering.

These are obligations both in justice and in love, and they are included among the fundamental requirements of the Christian life and every truly human life. . . . Indeed, we must do all we can to overcome suffering, but to banish it from the world altogether is not in our power. Only God is able to do this: only God who personally enters history by making himself man and suffering within history.

Death Penalty and Catholicism

Catholics' involvement in the death penalty killing spree is scandalous. Thankfully, our bishops have protested the present killing spree on July 14, on September 22, on November 18 and on December 7. Moreover, unequivocally the church teaches in the catechism "in the light of the Gospel, that 'the death penalty is inadmissible because it is an attack on the inviolability and dignity of the person' and she works with determination for its abolition worldwide."

Still, Catholics are assiduously ignoring these teachings. Attorney General Barr launched the killing spree without hesitation, and when the Catholic justices intervened and vacated preemptively the stays of execution, they effected these killings. The active Catholic participation in this killing spree is remarkable, and of course, scandalous, especially in as much as they rush the nation to committing these actual executions. . . .

We must recognize this killing spree as another moment of unparalleled violence in America, in-

deed a historically anomalous moment. We must also recognize that knowing Brandon Bernard, Lisa Montgomery and Cory Johnson ought to matter, and that the merciless brutality of the federal executions significantly matches the merciless brutality of the murders themselves.

Catholics in high offices have shown by their own extraordinary actions that they are among the most active participants in executing tragically vulnerable people. As we recognize this killing spree, let us commit ourselves to make our country and our church in this country less a household of violence and more a kingdom of peace. Indeed, there is more work to be done than we may realize.

[This article on Catholics and the death penalty was published in *National Catholic Reporter* on December 10, 2020, written by Jesuit Fr. James F. Keenan, Canisius Professor at Boston College and William R. Montross Jr., a capital-defense attorney for 17 years, formerly with the Southern Center for Human Rights and currently with the Military Commission Defense Organization.]

My child, when you come to serve the Lord, prepare yourself for testing . . . for in fire gold and silver are proven (Sir 2:1).

Every Benedictine novice hears this biblical instruction upon entering the community.

When this issue of *The Oblate* reaches you, we will be just days away from another Ash Wednesday inviting us into a season of purification. Cassian teaches that "purity of heart" is the goal of monasticism/Benedictinism. Buckle up!

How does God purify us? A bible group was studying Malachi 3:3, and one woman was puzzled by "The Lord will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify them." What did this mean? She found a silversmith who agreed to show her how he did it. He sat beside a hot

fire, holding some silver over the center of the fire, the hottest part. "Do you have to stay sitting here and watching the silver all the while?" she asked. "Yes," the silversmith said, "because if the silver is not properly heated or if it is removed too soon, it will contain impurities; and if it is removed too late, the silver will be destroyed." "So," the woman asked, "how do you know when it's the right time to remove it?" "Oh," the silversmith said, "that's easy. When I can see my image in it."

Maybe someday the rite of adult baptism could include this biblical admonition as well, pointing out that every Christian's life is a way of restoring God's image in which each one of us has been created. A Blessed Lent to all. *Ed.*

Mindfulness is crucial in attending to the physical world. As Alice Walker notes in her work *The Color Purple*, "I think that God would be pissed if someone walked past the color purple and didn't notice."

Sitting in a secluded place by Lake Sagatagan off Pickerel Point I gradually become part of the symphony. There is the steady ebb and flow of the waves, the graceful refrain of the wind, the slap-happy dance of the leaves, the cumulus clouds folding and turning through the sky.

Writers such as Annie Dillard describe a heightened awareness in our relationship with nature. By observing and reflecting on the day-to-day changes in a particular, specific environment, these authors articulate a passionate love for the natural world in which they live and a mindful sense of the presence of God.

What fascinates Dillard in particular is not only nature's design but also its randomness, terror, and violence. Careful attention to the world of weasels and eagles, pond scum, genetics and geography reveals the mystery of life as both compelling and fearsome.

Dillard describes the renewal that comes from being absorbed by the creation. She writes: "It was sunny one evening last summer at Tinker creek; the sun was low in the sky, upstream. I was sitting on the sycamore log bridge with the sunset at my back, watching the shiners the size of minnows who were feeding over the muddy sand in skittery schools. Again and again, one fish, then another, turned for a split second across the current and flash! The sun shot out from its silver side.

"I couldn't watch for it. It was always just happening somewhere else, and it drew my vision as it disappeared: flash, like a sudden dazzle of

the thinnest blade, a sparking over the olive ground at chance intervals from every direction.

"Something broke and something opened. I filled up like a new wineskin. I breathed an air like light; I saw a light like water. When I see this way, I see truly.

"As Thoreau says, 'I return to my senses.'"

Mindfulness depends on a desire to be mindful. This desire requires our decision and our discipline. Practice, practice, practice.

Breathing attentively; Gazing patiently;
Moving thoughtfully; Receiving gratefully;
Worshipping wholeheartedly;
Working diligently, i.e., lovingly.

We enter more and more deeply into the mystery of God. God becomes more alive in us. And we in God.

Walking on Ice

When walking on ice
be watchful and vigilant —
but at the same time,
light-hearted and confident.

Live your life the same way —
for lack of vigilance
leads to disaster,
but too much caution
to timidity.

Take risks,
especially out of love,
but at the same time,
be alert and attentive
to the path you are on.





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

Until Covid-19 Pandemic ends, these events will be accessible on Zoom. Shortly before the event, Father Michael, the oblate director, will send an email with the necessary link to access the Zoom meeting.

First Saturday of Month: Oblate Formation

March 21, 2021: Lenten Day of Reflection

July 16-18, 2021: Annual Oblate Retreat



Photo: Michael Peterson, OSB

Abbot: John Klassen, OSB; **Oblate Director:** Michael Peterson, OSB; **Editor:** Donald Tauscher, OSB;
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