

The Oblate

News Magazine of the Oblates of Saint John's Abbey

October 2021

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Fr. Nickolas Becker, OSB, will give a conference entitled "On Moral Gentleness: John 8: 1-11" at the In-Person Oblate Day of Reflection on Sunday, 21 November. Father Nickolas was ordained a priest for the Diocese of Sioux City in Iowa and served four years in parish ministry there. Then the Holy Spirit called him northward, where he entered the novitiate of Saint John's Abbey in 2006 and made profession as a monk in 2007.

Father Nickolas earned his doctorate in moral theology at the Alfonsian Academy in Rome in

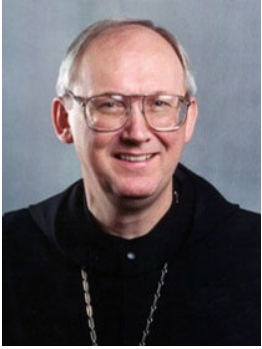
2016 and since then has been a professor of moral theology in the Theology Department and the School of Theology-Seminary. He is also a faculty resident in the university and provides weekend assistance at area parishes.

Oblates will find Father Nickolas to be a dynamic, personable and knowledgeable presenter. Following is a brief introduction, by him, of his planned presentation:

One of the great themes of Pope Francis has been the importance of accompaniment. The Rule of Benedict images the Abbot as a master of accompaniment for all his monks, "so that the strong have something to yearn for and the weak have nothing to run from." (RB 64). Yet we have to ask ourselves in our own lives as Christians -- how do we accompany others (particularly loved ones) who make moral choices with which we do not agree? This conference will speak about the virtue of gentleness, particularly moral gentleness, and will highlight the ministry of Jesus as an icon of that virtue. To register, call or write Oblate office.

- 9:30 am Fellowship in Great Hall
- 10:30 am Eucharist
- 11:45 am Lunch in Quad 264
- 12:30 pm Small group *lectio divina*
- 1:30 pm Conference by Father Nickolas
- 2:10 pm Group Discussion
- 3:00 pm Blessing and Departure

Abbot John Klassen, OSB



How was your day? The question, asked by someone who cares, is kind. Often, though, it throws me. The day has passed in a whirl and I have to grope for an answer. Not bad, I reply vaguely. How was my day? Really? Good question.

Where did I — or you — meet God today? In one of my elders who could die any day; on the Lake Wobegon trail; in the sheer beauty of the trees and fields, even though they are battered by drought; in the thoughtfulness of a colleague.

Days are where we live. They are large enough to absorb many activities but small enough that we can see them whole. Yet many days slip by without being noticed. Some vanish in a moment because they are so expansive. Such days are when I'm doing something completely different or learning something new or seeing something for the first time. I lose track of time because I lose myself in something or someone utterly captivating.

More often, however, a day is lost to smallness. A grocery list of obligations, shredded by interruptions, the day disintegrates into dust that blows away in the wind. I am left empty-handed and exposed, unable to answer a simple question: what the heck happened to the day?

This past year we emptied our monastery building. I lived in another building some distance from prayer and work. This was a graced disruption for me. Each morning, coming out of the front door of the residence, facing east, I would intentionally welcome the day; pray for God's blessing on the day, the grace to do what needed to be done. Always with an awareness that this could be my death anniversary.

For the day in question is not just any day or 24 hours in linear sequence. It is this day. Now. Too often, this is the very one that escapes our attention, the day whose gifts we scorn.

Carpe diem. Seize the day.

Michael Peterson, OSB



"What, dear sisters and brothers, is more delightful than this voice of the Lord calling to us?" (*Prologue 19*) All of us, both monastics and oblates, have followed this voice of Jesus in our own individual and communal ways. How, then,

can you and I bring Jesus to others?

RB 31, "The Qualifications of the Monastery Cellarer" has a memorable line. "He or she will regard all utensils and goods of the monastery as the sacred vessels of the altar." For a long time I took this to mean, treat well and be good stewards of what you own. Even more meaningful, all your ordinary belongings have a sacred value. In other words, reverence everything you own as the cup and plate we use at Eucharist. The ordinary is sacred -- that's very Benedictine. Good!

Recently one of our oblates commented: "What are the sacred vessels of the altar used for? They are for bringing Jesus to people." At the Eucharist, Jesus is present to us as we eat and drink from the plate and the cup. Benedict is saying that our whole life, including all the utensils and goods we own, are ways of bringing Jesus to others. Pots and pans, dinner table, computer, car, boat, rake, shovel, hoe, desk, pen and paper, cell phone, even your shoes. Wiggle your toes right now. Wiggle your toes. Do you feel your shoes? Your shoes are as sacred as the vessels of the altar. How do your shoes bring Jesus to others? Yes, all that we have are sacred vessels bringing Jesus to others on the altar of the world!

The great mystery and beauty of the Eucharist is that we receive Jesus in the most human way as hungry people, listening to the stories of Jesus, and, with open hands, eating and drinking together. Then we go out to bring people to Jesus, whose voice is delightful.

Oblate Milestones

♦ Candidacy

Kathy Janku. May 17. SJP Theology instructor.

Bruce Bonnicksen. September 24. He is from Rochester, MN.

♦ Oblations

Jim Platten. Oblation July 8. From Avon, MN. "I have had a long relationship with Saint John's Abbey and University. Making oblation feels like the natural, next step toward deepening this relationship."

Gunnar Olaf Gundersen. Oblation July 30. From Newport Beach, CA. "The *Rule*, supervised by the monastery, is part of how the community is already helping me diligently use my instruments to be of better use to my family and parish."

Kimberly Belcher. Oblation Aug 1. From Granger, IN. "I have worked at Saint John's University in liturgy. The Benedictine way of life is a path I'm deeply connected to."

Charles Miller. Oblation Aug 16. From Sauk Rapids, MN. "The *Rule* is a good guide for me as a spouse, parent, and as a teacher at Prep School."

♦ Deaths

Thomas Carey. Died April 15, 2021

James Hamilton. Died June 1, 2021

Colleen Couteaux, mother of **Oblate Patrick Couteaux.** Died June 11, 2021

Florence Ann Lewandowski. Died August 30, 2021.

Oblate Activities

Dr. Gerald Schlabach, ObISB, Collegeville Institute Resident Scholar and University of St. Thomas Emeritus Professor of Theology, will present a lecture, *Pilgrim People of Peace*, on Monday, October 4 from 6-7:30 pm. The lecture will focus on why Catholics and Mennonites need each other, as expressed through the ecumenical group Bridgefolk.

Bridgefolk is a grass roots movement of Mennonites and Roman Catholics who, through baptism, share the calling of the One who prayed that his followers be one. Monks of Saint John's Abbey meet annually with Mennonite members of Bridgefolk to celebrate each other's traditions, explore each other's practices, and enrich each other's contributions to the mission of Christ's Church. Gatherings include dialogue, ritual celebration, and fellowship. The board meets annually also.

Almut Furchert, Ph.D. and Chuck Huff, ObISB will host a Hildegard Seminar that offers a 5-month-long deep learning experience consisting of seven Saturday morning Zoom sessions and an online conversation in-between. Dates are: Oct 16, 30; Nov 6, 20; Dec 11, 2021; Jan 15, 29, 2022 CT.

Registration and further information available cloisterseminars.org <furcherthuff@gmail.com>

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.

I couldn't be physically present at the abbey in



July, so I joined others tuning in via Zoom. Here are some of the thoughts Sister Michaela shared that touched me. (There are many more.)

The **Friday night** convocation centered on *Hope in the Old Testament*, shown by Abraham and Sarah, Ruth and Naomi, and even the Hebrews who first stepped into the waters of the Red Sea. We tell the story of Moses' staff parting the Red Sea, but, says the Midrash: "The waters did not part until the Hebrews stepped in." "Hope takes place," says Karl Barth, "in the act of taking the next step."

Taking that step of hope as Abraham did when he trusted God's call to leave for an unknown place, and even when he walked up Mount Moriah with his son Isaac. Taking that step as Ruth the Moabite who followed Naomi to Israel and became David's great grandmother. Ordinary, vulnerable, imperfect people, just like us. We may fail but even then God will take care of us and protect us. After all, he fashioned clothes to protect Adam and Eve before he sent them away from the Garden of Eden. We can trust God, our protector.

Saturday morning found us pondering *Hope in the New Testament Letters*. Perhaps because he had such a variety of experiences with Christ, Peter has much to say about

hope. "Always have your answer ready for those who ask you for the reason for your hope" (1 Peter 3:15). What is the reason for our hope? An important question to ponder.

Hope is deeper than optimism. Optimism is concerned with outcomes, results. Hope includes peace with the conviction that something makes sense and is worthwhile no matter how it turns out.

Hope is the stuff of commitments: oblate promises, monastic vows, marriage vows. It takes us through life's ups and downs. And yes, we need to see the "lows," embrace our pain, pray our Lamentations. Yet hope brings us to joy; "Rejoice in hope," says Paul (Rom 12:12).

In all his addresses, despite all his many concerns, Pope Francis makes the connection to joy and hope, and he exudes a spirit of joy. His advice is: "One word to you: joy. Be glad, rejoice, radiate joy." Through joy we bring Christ to others, we welcome the stranger, and we exercise hospitality.

Benedictines are people of hope. Hope is communal. We do not hope alone. We carry one another's burdens, lift each other up. We can give hope through prayers, presence, and actions.



Brian, Lucy, Barbara, Carol and Pam take a short break and visit.



At every retreat, oblates mention that joining the monks for prayer is a highlight. They do this six times during the retreat.

Saturday afternoon focused on *Hope in the Gospels*. What is our image of God? How are we looking at God, and how do we think God is looking at us? Does God smile at us? Do we smile at God? Jesus is the living smile of God who accompanies us on our journey, giving us hope because he is with us and will be with us until the end of ages (Mt 28:20). Jesus bolsters our hope with his every sermon, parable, and miracle, climaxed by his passion, death, resurrection and glorification.

The word “hope” itself though is absent from the Gospel of Mark, and not that frequent in the other Gospels. But it is the nature of his approach that conveys hope: an approach that minimizes (don’t say anything about cure), prefers the ordinary; an approach centered upon the marginalized in Galilee. Hence, the Sermon on the Mount is core, as well as Mt 25.

Sunday morning led us to reflect upon *Hope in the Rule of Benedict*. The RB is a trellis, a struc-

ture that provides us support as we grow, not a set of laws designed to defeat us. When reading RB 4 (the tools for good works), it would be easy to lose heart ... until we get to the last tool (74): “Never lose hope in God’s mercy.” Similarly, in the 4th step of humility Benedict cites Romans 8:37: “In all this we overcome because of him who so greatly loved us.”

The ritual of monastic profession includes the “*Suscipe*” sung three times: “Sustain me by your promise that I may live; do not disappoint me in my hope.” It may be hard at times to persevere in living as a Benedictine, and we need to re-commit every day. It is good to remember Paul’s words: “We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

Book Review in Retirement

Thoughts on *The Hours of the Universe: Reflections on God, Science, and the Human Journey*, Ilia Delio, OSF; Orbis Books, 2021.

Ilia Delio's most recent book is fascinating, challenging, enlightening, and terrifying all at the same time. A Franciscan Sister of Washington, D.C., Delio is a scientist and theologian with doctorates in pharmacology and historical theology. As a Franciscan, by way of the Carmelites, she holds deeply Duns Scotus' understanding of "thisness", particularity (haecceity), especially when speaking of Christ. She has a gift for making Teilhard de Chardin almost understandable for me. For Delio, God is overabundant love poured out continually, the universe evolving continually, and the human person being a partner in that love evolution.

Not being a theologian or scientist, I truly appreciate her gift for making extremely complex topics simple enough to absorb. The book consists of a series of self-contained essays organized by the Liturgy of the Hours—starting with Matins and ending with Compline. Each section begins with a poem, prose poetry. Some chapter titles include: Living in a Wavy Universe; God in the Midst of Pain; Race and Axial Consciousness; Hope in a Time of Crisis; Brother Mango and Eternity.

Delio references Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, Fr. Raimon Panniker, Beatrice Bruteau, Thomas Merton, OCSO, Richard Rohr, OFM, and many more throughout. She ties together spirituality, Christ, Christian theology, human development and consciousness, religion, community, the science of evolution, and our current environmental crisis. All is a whole, we are only energy materialized, everything is interconnected and woven together as the continuing explosion of God's Love. She speaks of panentheism (not pantheism) and human persons' role in the continuing unfolding of the cosmos—human consciousness as the whole point of evolution, human persons as co-creators. God is always both/and, immanent and transcendent. As co-creators, we have choices to make about how or whether we will co-

Eileen Wallace, ObISB

operate with the God of on-going creation. Delio is very clear about the urgency of our responsibility, especially those of us in the first world, to live more simply, to make significant changes if we want to have a place to live at all, and our need to do this as a whole people of the planet. That is the very scary part.



I experienced *The Hours of the Universe* as sacred reading. I do not usually do *Lectio* formally (I know, I'm working on it); however, I am always reading something having to do with scripture or spirituality. Ilia Delio's book felt very sacred, very holy in many places and often I could only read one page a day because I needed to live with it and ponder it throughout the course of the day. It's worth the discomfort, worth the struggle to grasp a different way of viewing God's creative process, worth the accountability it calls me to and the changes I need to make in my consumption, and my commitment to be a change agent.

Most of all it is very, very worth any struggle because Delio articulates the constant, hugely apparent, creative grace of a God who loves us SO much that love just gushes out in all directions—Christ, first and foremost, whales, giraffes, babies' teeny, weeny fingernails, seeds going in the ground and producing food, the care of a friend, trumpeter swans flying over Saint John's in the morning, pink sky after prayer, the first flowers of spring, snow, stars, a universe so large and so small it's incomprehensible, and black holes and dark matter...as my daughter would say, "What's up with that?!" The cosmos is amazing and being engulfed in the love of the Trinity is even more amazing and an experience most of us have to grow into. Take a leap into *The Hours of the Universe* with an open mind as a child of stardust. Your heart may be opened and you may be surprised by Love!

Regional Oblate Chapters Resume

Covid-19 did a number on many lives and aspects of lives. Regional oblate chapters had to cease in-person meetings for a year-and-a-half, and for various reasons most could not meet via Zoom either. Fortunately, during this time of pandemic **Fr. Michael Peterson, OSB**, our oblate director, has provided virtual oblate formation days of reflection on the first Saturday of every month. Note that the next one is October 2 beginning at 9 am on Zoom.

Each meeting offers the opportunity for individual greetings and check-in, a presentation of a Benedictine theme by Father Michael or a volunteer, plus commentary and Q&A. Oblates from the Orient, the east and west coasts of the USA, as well as from heartland homes in Texas, Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, the Dakotas and, yes, Minnesota, have tuned in. (Did I miss any?) Paradoxically, Covid shut down in-person meetings but gave us a chance to “see” some of our fellow oblates from a much larger area.

Oblate Nicholas Tangen has been providing a monthly virtual prayer session on final Saturdays at 10 am. At long last, in August, these sessions became available in person, at University Lutheran Church of Hope in the sanctuary. Enter at north entrance: 601 13th Ave SE, Minneapolis. After check-in there are readings from Scripture and the Rule with time for brief sharing, intercessory prayers, centering prayer and closing oration. Our thanks to Nicholas for his devoted contributions to oblate life.

Oblate Ron Joki reports that the pre-pandemic chapter meetings included monastic style prayer with an interlude of group *lectio divina* followed by hospitality in the form of shared

food and beverages along with conversation and discussion on a chosen topic. Members would volunteer to be prayer leader, refreshment provider or topic presenter and group discussion leader. We began on September 12 with this format, but because of COVID restrictions, we did not have the snacks, only beverages. Oblate Rich Lux had planned to offer some thoughts and lead us in discussion on the theme of hospitality from the perspective of his years of experience with Christian-Jewish dialogue. When he had to cancel and reschedule, Ron Joki led the group discussion.

Collegetown Chapter meets on the third Sunday of the month. The group gathers for Eucharist in the abbey church at 10:30 am. From there the meeting moves to the guest house where a fine meal—for a free will offering—sets the scene for greeting and conversation. Around 12:15 or so, a volunteer leader begins the discussion triggered by a chapter in *Radical Hospitality*. Sometimes it takes only a few lines from the book or a question or two from the leader to generate lively sharing of ideas and experiences. For the record, on September 19 the chapter resumed in-person participation, with careful current Covid protocols.

It is hoped that more oblates will soon be able to take advantage of these valuable opportunities to renew and be renewed in their good zeal and spiritual camaraderie.

Direct questions or requests to:

Nicholas Tangen—nicholastangen@gmail.com

Ron Joki—rejslp@aol.com; 952-649-9384

Father Michael—oblates@csbsju.edu

320.363.3022

Love and Hospitality



All guests are to be received as Christ, for he himself will say, "I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (RB 53:1

On a hot, sultry, June morning in 1996, I steered my car into the rising sun and headed to St. Joseph's Hospital for my chaplaincy internship. Nervous sweat trickled down my spine as I entered the hospital. A chaplain intern of several weeks, I was assigned to the general medical-surgical and oncology units. Most of the time I felt like a little kid playing at being a chaplain, much as I had once played at being a priest or a nun. I wanted to delay, I took the ancient elevator up to the fourth-floor oncology unit and, with a deep breath, made my way to the nurses' station.

The oncology unit was white, chilly, and smelled of disinfectant. When I checked in, the friendly sandy-haired charge nurse told me that today I would observe a hospice consult. I did not need to do any talking, she informed me, she and the social worker would handle everything. Everything, she emphasized, a twinkle in her blue eyes, and I had the uncomfortable feeling she could see through my thinly constructed veneer of professionalism, right down to the quaking tremors now rocketing my stomach.

The moment the three of us entered the hospital room I saw her. A tiny, elderly woman, dwarfed by her hospital bed, with enormous, haunted, dark eyes dominating a peaked white face. A native of Poland, she spoke little English but was nonetheless able to understand her di-

Barbara Marincel, Oblate Candidate

agnosis: inoperable stomach cancer. Six months, maybe less, to live.

A chaplain intern for only three weeks, I was observing my first hospice consult. What does a twenty-something graduate theology student say to a lonely and frightened dying woman who cannot speak English?

As I watched, a tear formed in one of those huge dark eyes and slid slowly down her face. Then another. And another. Her small frail body began to shake. In a flash I forgot my inexperience and put my arms around her and buried my face against her shoulder. I dug my dad's old black rosary out of my pocket, and as we wept and prayed together, love overcame the barriers of language and age, binding us together as fellow pilgrims walking hand in hand together on the journey home.

Reflecting upon this incident 25 years in the past has gotten me thinking about my oblate candidacy experience. How often these days do I spontaneously leave the safety of my hidden corners to risk reaching out to others in love? Being a bit of an introvert, I often find this a challenging task. But The Rule of St. Benedict demands no less; the porter spirituality to which we are called, as seen in RB 53, asks that we share Christ's love with each other, and with (especially with) the stranger in our midst. As I approach oblation, I have come to realize that living out our Benedictine spirituality requires many such risks, asking me to draw deeply upon my store of courage, to hope and trust in God, and take the leap into a life of vulnerability, tenderness, connection, and yes, joy.

Pharisees and Us



Pharisees were not really bad people. They were observant Jews concerned about good relationship with God by observing carefully the Law of Moses. The time of Jesus was challenging for Jews in

Judea and Galilee, which were controlled by Rome. The powerful influence of Greek and Roman culture and religion was a threat to traditional Jewish observance. Emperor worship was detestable to Jews. So was paying taxes to pagan Rome. The Pharisees were resisting this foreign influence on Jewish life while encouraging Jews to remain faithful to the Law of Moses and teaching them how to do this in a difficult time. They believed in the resurrection of the dead, a rather new religious idea that not all Jews held. The Pharisees were trying to help the same people that Jesus was trying to help, their fellow Jews. There was tension between the Pharisees and Jesus and his disciples, probably because there was a lot of overlap in the people they were trying to reach and the ideas they were teaching.

The book of Deuteronomy shows two primary concerns: avoiding worship of the false gods already in the land; and being just in dealing with others. If a debtor gave their cloak as a pledge, the lender had to return the cloak each evening so the poor borrower would have something to keep warm at night. A poor person might sell himself or herself to another as a slave, perhaps to pay off a debt. The person could be kept as a slave for only six years. The master was to give animals, grain and wine as a blessing to the one released from servitude. This

Brad Jenniges, OSB

justice extended even beyond Israel. If Edomites or Egyptians came into the land, their children of the third generation could come into the assembly to worship God.

Jesus is concerned less with ritual purity and more with what is in the heart. Greed, envy, malice, arrogance, deceit, and other evils come from within, from the heart, and they truly defile us. Fastidious washing and purifying one's hands and kettles while neglecting to root out evils from the heart misses something essential. When neglected, the evils in our hearts become ingrained in us and we cannot imagine our life without them.

Rooting out evil may take a radical, life-altering conversion. How much time do I spend listening to commentators who distort the positions of their opponents in order to portray them as evil? Do I spread misleading rumors and speculation that undermine confidence in our political institutions or the scientific and medical communities that are seeking to maintain or recover a stable natural and social world that people may thrive? Do I share my knowledge or expertise with humble respect for the particular circumstances of those I would teach? Do I temper my judgments and words about other people with mercy, as God's judgments of me are tempered? Do I neglect to call attention to injustice for fear of the wrath of the powerful? We need God's grace to face any evil present in our hearts. Where do we begin such a daunting task? One small step could be taking time to enjoy the beauty of the natural world and letting that shape our understanding of the kind of God who created the universe. That understanding may permeate our hearts and teach us how to be and to act.



On the July 11th, 2021 Feast of Saint Benedict, during the liturgy of making final vows, Br. Jacob Berns, OSB stood before the monastic community and prayed "Sustain me, Lord, as you have promised, and I shall live;

do not disappoint me in my hope." This is a paraphrase of Psalm 119:116 and when I returned home, I asked myself, "What is my hope as an Oblate of the Saint John's Abbey monastic community?" This led me to *lectio divina* on the context of 119:116. The previous verse bemoans any person with a "divided heart" toward embracing God's law and verse 117 pleads for God's assistance in following the path toward salvation. With these three verses ringing in my ears, I was led to the exhortation of Abbot John Klassen, OSB at the end of each daily office: "May the divine assistance remain with us always."

Brother Jacob has vowed commitment to obedience, stability, and *conversatio morum*. He will listen to the Rule of Benedict, his abbot, and his community and be a steward of the needs of his community. He will remain a part of that community and discover God's presence in the life of the community. He will be committed to daily conversion of life and be faithful to the monastic manner of life as a single-hearted quest for God. This is his hope and he will always depend on God's assistance, because Abbot John reminds us that Benedict has set a very "high bar" and we do not always reach it.

So what is my hope as an oblate? How do the three monastic vows relate to me? Once again, *lectio divina* has come to my rescue. Only this time my *lectio* is focused on a book by an Orthodox lay person, the theologian Paul Evdokimov. In his book *The Art of the Icon: a theology of beauty* Evdokimov speaks of "interiorized monasticism." He mirrors the thought of Saint John Chrysostom, who declares that the values of monastic life can and should become tangible in the lives of lay persons, single or married. This means that the heart of Benedict's Rule and the vows of obedience, stability, and *conversatio morum* are for me, too. Although I live a different manner of

life from Brother Jacob, I am also on a single-minded quest for God.

What does my quest look like? The desert abba John the Simple makes it very clear: "Keep close to Jesus." The Rule of Benedict shows me a path and discipline that will keep me close to Jesus in my daily life.

I seek obedience by listening to God in daily prayer, to my wife and family, and to people around me. I try to discern and respond to the needs of my community and seek advice from them.

I seek stability by being faithful to reflecting on the Rule and continuing to discern how it relates to my daily life. My stability includes remaining in contact with the oblate programs offered by Saint John's Abbey, their annual retreat (when possible), and with other oblates.

I seek conversion of life with daily prayer (Keeping close to Jesus!). A friend of mine calls this "hanging out with God." Meditation and contemplative prayer help me listen and be honest about myself and see others as God sees them. Reading and meditation on the Bible is essential, but I don't always make time for that. The weekly Eucharist is a bottom line, as is participation in my faith community. I wish I could say that I always, even most of the time, reach this "high bar."

If it is a six-foot bar, I clear two feet most of the time, three feet many times, and four, five, and six feet once in a great while. But I have learned from Jesus that persistence and faithfulness are what he desires. His strength and healing grace make all the difference in my quest.

This is my hope as an oblate. And I know that God's assistance will fulfill what I lack. Although Brother Jacob and I share differing manners of life, we share a single-minded quest for God. I think Benedict would agree! Our common goal is union with Jesus, his experience of God, and living our lives rooted in that relationship. This union, made possible by the movement of the Holy Spirit within us, is the source of our union with each other, with our neighbor, and with all creation.

The Birth and Work of a Wonder Monk

On September 16 Fr. Kilian McDonnell, OSB, celebrated his 100th birthday. Alert and social, this monk priest, theologian, professor, ecumenist, and poet welcomed several of his Montana family over a period of several days. This was an event to celebrate. Father Kilian is only the second monk in the 165 year history of Saint John's to reach 100 years of age. In July he celebrated his 75th anniversary of monastic profession. So we have had reasons to celebrate this summer, Covid-19 to the contrary notwithstanding.

Of special note is that when Kilian turned 75, he began a career of studying and writing poetry, as if to say, Who me, retire? I'll write five volumes of poems. The most recent *Abbey Banner* has included more of Father Kilian's story and a poem sampler. We also include some samples here.

THE WHORING DAUGHTER

When his [Jesus'] mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Matthew 1:18

You see, Mother,
while I was busy
in the kitchen
with a pitcher

of water I'd brought
from the well, an angel

of light appeared
to say the Holy Spirit

would overshadow and rest
upon me to make a child

within my womb without
the seed of any man. The boy

will be the Son of God
and his reign will never end.

That's why my belly bulges.
Mother, please, it's true.

Don Tauscher, OSB

THE DEATH OF JOSEPH

Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his faithful ones. Psalm 116:15

I'm in the kitchen
washing the evening dishes
when I hear a clatter
in the shop.
Nothing unusual;
Joseph drops clamps
or boards occasionally.
But when it's to quiet
I poke my head inside.
There he is on his back
on the sawdust,
hands clutching his chest,
still breathing. I scream
for help but Jesus is out dancing
with friends. I run next door
for Rachel and Jacob, send
for my son. We get Joseph
to his bed. No doctor
in the village so I send
for midwife Sarah
who loosens his shirt,
cools his brow with a wet rag.
Jesus rushes into the room.
We stand beside the bed, praying
Psalm twenty-one:
*You set a crown
of fine gold on his head.
You gave length of days
forever and ever.*
Joseph opens his eyes,
tries to speak
but there is no sound.
He drops his right hand
at his side.

Both poems are from the volume *Aggressive Mercy*. Other titles are: *Swift, Lord, You are Not; Yahweh's Other Shoe; God Drops and Loses Things; Wrestling with God*.



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

November 21, 2021 Advent Day of Reflection

March 20, 2022 Lenten Day of Reflection



Paul Jasmer, OSB

Abbot: *John Klassen, OSB*; **Oblate Director:** *Michael Peterson, OSB*; **Assistant Oblate Director/Editor:** *Don Tauscher, OSB*; **Production Assistant:** *Josie Stang*; **Printing /Mailing:** *Beth Lensing*; **Circulation:** *Cathy Wieme.*

Contact Oblate Office

320.363.3022 oblates@csbsju.edu Website: saintjohnsabbey.org/oblates/