

The Oblate

News Magazine of the Oblates of Saint John's Abbey

June 2020

Volume 64 Number 2

COVID-19 cancels retreat. This year we have memories.

St. John's University Events is not hosting any events here this summer, so our oblate retreat will not occur on site. However, keep July 17-19 open. We should be able to have Zoom conferences available via live-stream. Also, there are many oblate candidates ready for final oblation. I think we can make this happen creatively.



The Disruption of Pandemic: Covid-19

In the recent past, especially within the business environment, we heard a lot about disruption, about disruptive innovations. By this was meant innovations that improved a product or service in a way that the market did not expect. We ended up with a whole new set of products or services and the old market went away.

Some examples: think of what digital cameras did to Kodak and the market for film and its development. In a short few years a multi-billion dollar industry dried up and the way we process photographs was completely changed. Big, strong, productive companies were often unable to respond because disruptions are so difficult to identify initially. Or think about what Amazon did, over a period of years, with online purchasing. All of a sudden big, successful companies like Best Buy had to scramble to reinvent their business model. Disruption.

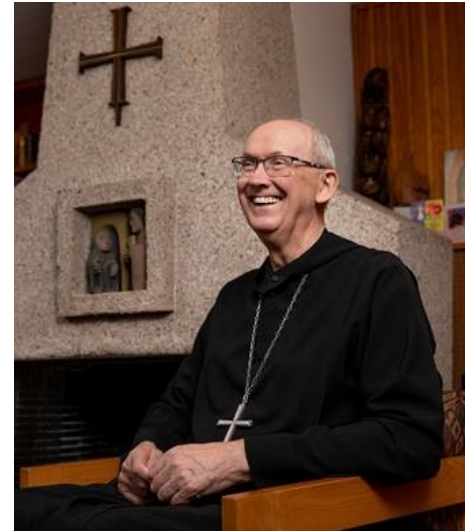
Most businesses thought they understood the nature of disruption until the COVID-19 pandemic hit this March. Suddenly, not just a few businesses, but our whole economy and all of the patterns of our life that are so enmeshed in the economy, were turned upside down. It was as if the virus said to all of us: Stop! Stop everything. Empty your calendar of all your major events for the next year. Slowly, the reality of our situation penetrated, as we began to realize the depth and scope of this pandemic.

I know that I may not even allow myself a whimper. As a community we have been blessed with the rhythm of our monastic prayer and Eucharist, which we have been able to sustain, albeit with some modifications. We are blessed with a large enough space so that we monks can distance for prayer, using the upper and lower choir stalls.

For some people, the radical disruption of distancing has thrown them into depression. We find ourselves watching out for each other, trying to ensure connection. I had used the program Zoom a few times in the past: now I use it three, four, five times a day. I am grateful for this technology that allows us to

Abbot John Klassen, OSB

accomplish so much, safely. However, it demands incredible concentration to follow complicated conversations among multiple partners. At the end of the day, exhaustion.



Uncertainty at a high level is enervating. Holding options A, B, C in one's imagination while having so little real information about the future requires energy and patience. Our understanding of the sources of infection and the way it moves has become clearer even as local communities and states try to "open" the economy without another spike in cases. Leadership teams across the Saint John's and Saint Ben's campuses are busily working through the planning for bringing students back to campus in the fall.

Community prayer is a stabilizing practice in this time of disruption, and so is *lectio divina*. I have deliberately given myself to reading demanding books such as Elizabeth Johnson's Creation and the Cross, Fleming Rutledge's The Crucifixion, and lighter fare by Sue Grafton – M is for Malice. I also do a program of regular physical exercise, alternating between cardio and strength training. The bike paths are magnificent!

Massive change – that is what this pandemic will bring to our world and to our country. In the face of so many unknowns, I am left with questions: What is the relevance and the contribution of our monastic life and witness to this future? How do we respond as oblates and monks to this "new normal"? What new gifts of the Spirit will be revealed? What do we as individuals, as families, and as communities have to let go of?

Story-Telling Time

Fr. Michael Peterson, OSB



diverse group of my student, brother monks from other parts of the world -- Mexico, Korea, Vietnam, Germany, China, Tanzania, even Wisconsin.

God prepares a feast for all people and God destroys the veil between peoples. In the banquet of heaven, we'll all be together. No partiality. No, wealthy here and poor there; no people of one skin color here and another skin color there; no Christian here and Muslim there. All people will be together. The segregation is done, over. The veil is removed, the shroud destroyed. Alleluia!

If our hope is that we will all eat together on God's mountain, if that's what God is ultimately going to create, why wait until then? Why not live that promise today? Let's hear attentively and honor one another's story!

Dear Oblates,

When strangers introduce themselves at a meal, what questions are you typically asked? Your name, where you're from, what's your job. Not bad. But what if you were asked, "Tell me something amazing about yourself!" What would you say? Frankly, people don't care about the data, the names, the dates, all those details that you're struggling to come up with in your mind. What they care about is you. They care about hearing your story. It's a beautiful way we can offer hospitality to one another. An amazing story is always better than data.

You can love your neighbor if you believe that everyone, yes everyone, has some hidden, amazing story about them. You can love yourself when you know that you are an amazing story. Learn to tell your story.

That's what we celebrate when we hear the readings proclaimed at liturgy. We don't hear about data; rather, we hear about the amazing story of Jesus Christ, God with us and God still with us. We hear about God's story intertwined with our story.

I love it when diverse people come together for a meal. At the abbey, it's a joy for me to eat with a

Notes:

For the past several months we have held a Zoom Formation Meeting on the first Saturday of the month. Especially now during the pandemic, when we can't meet face-to-face in person, it's a blessing to be able to meet face-to-face virtually, thanks to modern technology. In June Father Michael spoke on RB 48, "Manual Labor." These First Saturday meetings are going very well and many positive comments attest to the value of virtual get-togethers.

From June 1st through the 5th Saint John's Abbey monks had our annual retreat. Delivering the retreat conferences was Abbot Jeremy Driscoll, OSB, abbot of Mount Angel Abbey in Oregon. The retreat was notable for at least two things. First, Abbot Jeremy delivered his conferences via Zoom, a first for him and for us as well. Second, because of the need for social distance we monks had to make additional adjustments to the situation, and that included provision for lunch and dinner. Rather than having us crowded in the abbey refectory, we enjoyed our meals outside in the monastic garden.

Of Many (and/or Various and Sundry) Things

Candidacy

Christopher Ortega of Carona, CA made candidacy March 21.

Oblation

Brady Bryce of Abilene, TX made oblation March 4. Father Michael, oblate director, notes: A number of people want to make candidacy and oblation, but it has been quiet lately because people can't come here to the abbey. More oblations are planned during the July retreat via Zoom.

Deaths

- ♦ **Richard Koenig**, February 27, brother of Oblate **John Koenig** and son of Oblate **Patricia Koenig**
- ♦ **Allen Gise**, April 12
- ♦ **Stephen Pavkovich**, May 10

Abbey Practices during Covid-19

Liturgy — See Abbot John's column, p. 2.

Pastoral Ministry — In June, slowly opening up the churches with restrictions on assembly size.

Community Life — meetings, *Opus Dei*, meals with masks and distancing.

Breuer Renovation — demolition phase nearly complete with renovation to follow.

Guesthouse — closed to public until June 2021 — used for isolation and some limited housing for summer student workers.

Retirement Center — Quarantine for residents; staff in masks and gloves; Mass daily and meals on two shifts; (stay home, no visitors or routine off-campus appointments).

Monastic Institute — Postponed until summer 2021, so looking ahead and planning: Each presentation will host a variety of people — monastics, oblates, graduate students, laity — to engage in conversations and education about Benedictine monastic spirituality and life. The week will include many opportunities for prayer, socializing, and reflection.



How it feels some days during Covid-19

Please Note

If you have email but are not on our oblate email listserv, please consider joining the oblates who receive weekly notes and news from the director (and perhaps a rare note from the assistant). The news always includes prayer requests. To get on the listserv just send your "please add me" request with your current email address to oblates@csbsju.edu. Among other things you will receive the link to the Zoom meeting every month. Welcome aboard!

Zoom Formation Meetings

At 9:00 am Central Time on the first Saturday of the month, oblates with Zoom meet for a 25 minute conference by Father Michael on a chapter of the Rule. After the conference, oblates can contribute their thoughts and ideas for 20 minutes. The response has been very favorable. On June 6 we dealt with RB 48, "On Manual Labor."

Oblate Retreat Memories

Milo Larson, OblSB

One of the effects of Covid-19 is pain. A significant number of oblates have told us how they miss the summer oblate retreat. Here a fellow oblate shares some of his experiences of retreats that he has attended for 22 years.

I have many fond memories of the retreats over the past 22 years. I've met many wonderful oblates. My biggest regret is there isn't enough time to talk to all these great people.

The coronavirus has indeed put a crimp in everyone's life these past months and for months to come. I'm disappointed that the retreat is canceled but this affords me the opportunity to share some of my experiences attending this wonderful retreat.

Twenty-two years ago a person tapped me on my shoulder as I was going to communion in Sacred Heart Parish in Faribault, MN, and said he'd like to talk to me after Mass. This man was Ron Nelson, who had returned to Faribault after retiring from the service. Ron said he had noticed me a few Sundays at Mass, and he invited me to an oblate meeting at his house with a few other guys, saying that he thought I'd make a good oblate.

Little did I realize that first meeting would lead to weekly meetings through the winter. I met some fantastic men, including a great spiritual/oblate leader at the time, Father Allen. This was about to change my life.

July came and after I missed the annual retreat Father Allen invited our five freshmen to a private three-day retreat. I said I don't think I can make it; we had just moved into a new house in February and I was going gangbusters on our house and yard; sorry but I think I'll skip this one, maybe next year. Ron said no way, this is far too important to miss and you will be going. So I went.

In those days we stayed in a hot dorm, no air conditioning, just fans or open windows. That would be enough for anybody to say, that's it, I've had enough. Not this time. Father Brennan was our retreat master that first year; he kept things real loose and we were hooked. It was a great prelude for the next 22 years.

I love everything about the retreat: the beautiful

talks, the morning and noon meals, and the special dinner on Saturday night. I especially love talking one-on-one with as many people as I can. I feel God's presence in each and every one, and I do love taking pictures of everyone which I can share later on our oblate retreat page on Facebook.

But it is at the morning and evening prayers that I feel God's presence more than anywhere else. The hauntingly beautiful chants and the meaning of the words and music fill my heart while Godlike people surround me and pray.

Another sense of God's presence comes in the cemetery and on my little bench at the lake. I feel a closeness to God at the cemetery where I also feel very deeply the presence of my 4-year-old son who died in 1974. There I feel the presence also of everyone else buried there, especially Father Allen, who was laid to rest 2 years ago.

I love to get up at 5:30 in the morning and sit at the bench by the lake and watch the sun come up. As the sun creeps across the crystal blue water, the loons welcome me with one of the most beautiful sounds in the world. As it rises, the sun on my face warms the slight chill of night. God says, "Welcome son, you are witnessing one of my greatest features. Enjoy my creation, then go to morning prayer and rejoice with all my special people."

I am very grateful for my life, for all the ups and especially downs to realize there's always an end of the tunnel no matter how dark and long it may be sometimes. I am far from a religious scholar. I became Catholic in 1974; one who feels Christ and his people more than knowing the words, history, and all the teachings. I'm grateful for my family, and especially to all of you oblates and our wonderful leaders and past leaders at Saint John's; they've been excellent and always make time to listen to us. Father Don has done a wonderful job the past few years and Father Michael has taken up the baton and is doing a wonderful job.

I look forward to seeing you all next year and, as dear Father Allen would say as we parted, "Have a Gentle Day."

Oblate Voices

Below are notes from Oblates since Covid-19.

Fr. Michael, Thank you very much for giving these Saturday morning talks. Studying the Rule like this makes my day's choices quite a bit more intentional. It gives my day's choices more structure and results in better self care. This gives me more peace within. This internal peace is a better place for me to be patient or genuinely present to others. I wish you happiness. Thanks for doing this. *Carol*



Thank you, Father Michael. We have been attending Mass with you all via live streaming. It's been beautiful and fulfilling at this time. Peace, *Katie and George*



Thank you for sharing the zoom meeting, Fr Michael. I especially liked the study you mentioned about generosity resulting in more happiness. It is so true. It reminded me also of the day of reflection on the metta meditation.

As far as my own applications or situations that apply to me besides driving are things like having to wait a long time at the store. I was picking up some meds at Walgreens the other day, and they were short-staffed. I found myself in line, feeling irritated as no one was serving anyone for over 10 minutes or so, and no one was in sight though we could hear voices behind a partition. I decided I did not need to get upset at anyone. I chatted with the person ahead of me. We had a nice conversation, so when the employee finally was able to attend to us, the atmosphere was friendly, not tense, and all went well. Everyone was relaxed. The employee was happy and relieved no one was angry at her for the long wait. She actually went out of her way to help me later. Respect is often reciprocal, and yes, I have become more aware of such things because of the RB. (I did think of the RB during the Walgreens episode).

I also think of this when I deal with my students, or respond to Facebook posts, or participate in a meet-

ing. I am grateful for the RB, and I still have much to learn. I often tend to react too quickly and strongly.

Lucie



Fr. Michael, last Saturday, I sat at my desk with the computer on in anticipation of joining the second conference on "zeal." At five minutes prior to conference time my screen went blank. Very irritated that I couldn't figure out what was wrong. Then I glanced out the window. There I saw the cable provider disconnecting the cable and setting up to bury the new line that had been run about three months prior. What sad timing! Good thoughts about the cable company went down the drain (hard to make these stories up).

Thanks to the link I have had a chance to listen to the conference and to think about "good zeal." When I went to the gym regularly I made a habit of smiling and being cordial to everyone I met. There would always seem to be a grumpy individual who never acknowledged any type of greeting. I made him, and others over time, my special project. Ultimately the grump began to nod back and over time we became gym friends and even had little conversations. At that point I think he was a little happier as well. It is little rewards such as this that can result from practicing good zeal and energize me to continue. Thanks for your efforts to stay in touch. *John*



Dear Fr. Michael,

Please know the Abbey community is in my prayers every day. Please don't feel any pressure about a decision on the retreat. While I will sorely miss it, I know what a great responsibility it is to keep the community there safe as well as any retreatants. I really enjoyed last week's zoom conference and feel something like that could serve very well.

My wife, Lee, and I were out for a walk yesterday morning and it was unseasonably cool with a breeze

and we talked about how it reminded us of early mornings at Saint John's. Our hearts will be there if our bodies can't be! Grace and peace, *Dennis*



Fr Peterson, I want to extend my sincere gratitude for all your updates and especially for the monthly Saturday AM connection. God is always present, and during the last presentation, Therese from Milwaukee reached out to me via chat when I mentioned I lived in Wisconsin—so though they are in Milwaukee, I do hope to at least connect at the next 27th Zoom meeting and hopefully meet the group in person some day. Dr. Lux and others from the group also connected via email—very refreshing and exciting.

When our son was in school in Grand Forks, ND, our Abbey visits were more frequent—definitely miss that scenic and Holy Spirit filled environment.

I also learned from the group that Saint John's has a master's program in Theology. I will check that out as I have been researching programs for several months and was seriously contemplating the online program at St. Thomas. My goal is purely academic and spiritual growth as I am near retirement in my career as a physician. Thought it was going to be this year but the time away from my patients due to the pandemic proved to me that I am not ready to give it up.

Completed 2 years of LFI and then Leader of Prayer through Diocese of La Crosse and loved the academia, personal and community growth.

Thanks for any info you may have in regards to oblates in Northern and Central Wisconsin. Have a great weekend! *Laurel*



Fr. Michael, We understand the reasoning behind not holding the Oblate conference this summer! We will look for your virtual conferences and then look forward to the Oblate conference in 2021! Be well. You remain in our prayers always!
Peace, *Mark & Carol*

Fr. Michael, I have been working from home during this shelter in place time. The governor just extended this in Michigan until at least the end of the month. I think once this is over I will need a long vacation from any kind of on-line anything. I have a new appreciation for the people whose job requires sitting in front of a screen all day. I have been planning a Covid-safe revised summer schedule for classes, not really knowing if they will happen or not. Speaking of that, I can't imagine a socially distant oblate retreat this summer. How would this ever happen? How could you ever share that dessert table on-line? I guess we shall see how it all plays out.

I have had a break from screen time work. I spent the day splitting wood for our postponed wood firing. I was beat by the end of the day, but it felt good. Also I have started some new clay pieces. This kind of work is sort of contemplative for me. It keeps me somewhat sane—well, sort of.

Yesterday an elderly friend of mine passed away. She would always use my arm to steady herself as I walked her over to coffee and donuts after Mass. She had a son, about my age, who also is a Benedictine oblate. I think at St. Procopius. She didn't die of Covid-19, but the virus is preventing any kind of gathering, funeral (family only, less than 10) or sharing of stories about her life. This is quite unsettling to me.

I have also been loving the monthly oblate formation zoom meetings. I just soak it up. I always feel nurtured and honored to be in the company of such a beautiful group of people. I know I have been blessed...the journey continues! Peace, *Brian*



A Most Different Summer

Dear Saint John's Oblates,

Every year we monks renew our vows in community, or privately if we cannot attend the community retreat. All oblates who do not have the occasion to renew their oblation at Saint John's Abbey during an Oblate retreat, Day of Reflection or with a local Oblate chapter, are encouraged to make their renewal privately and send a completed renewal form (see below) to our Oblate Office. We wish to encourage your ongoing, active interest in the Oblate program and your personal growth in Benedictine spirituality. If you are no longer interested in the Oblate Program and do not wish to receive our newsletter, this might be a good opportunity to let us know your intention.

For those of you who wish to strengthen your oblate commitment, here are a few useful tools to consider. Peace!

●**DAILY PRAYER:** *Rule of Benedict:* Prologue.
"What, dearest friends, can be sweeter to us than this voice of the Lord inviting us?"

-How do I foster a deeper relationship with God through daily prayer?

-Do I find the Liturgy of the Hours in some form helpful to prayer?

●**SPIRITUAL READING:** *Rule of Benedict:* Ch. 4.
"Listen willingly to holy reading."

-How do I let myself be nourished and inspired by sacred reading (*lectio divina*)?

-Do I read the *Rule* often and are other books on Benedictine themes helpful?

●**SERVICE TO OTHERS:** *Rule of Benedict:* Ch. 35.
"Let them serve one another."

-Am I involved with my family, my neighbors, my faith community and the world?

●**CONTACT WITH OBLATE DIRECTOR AND/OR OTHER OBLATES:** *Rule of Benedict:* Ch. 72.
"May God lead us all together to everlasting life."

-When did I last attend an Oblate Day of Reflection or the July Oblate retreat?

-Am I involved with one of the Oblate chapters?

-When was the last time I contacted the Oblate Office via phone (320-363-3022)? Surface mail? Email (oblates@csbsju.edu)?

RENEWAL OF OBLATION

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

NAME _____

DATE _____

PHONE _____

EMAIL _____

Since our Lenten Day of Reflection and July retreat were cancelled because of Covid-19, July 11, the Solemnity of Saint Benedict, is an excellent time to renew your oblation.

Please copy/return to:

Oblate Office
Saint John's Abbey
PO Box 2015
Collegeville, MN 56321

Stability: Not Just for Monks

Fr. Eric Hollas, OSB

The other day a friend of mine asked about my stability. I hasten to say that it was not mental stability that concerned him. Rather, the stability in question was the distinctive vow that Benedictine men and women have taken for centuries. What is that all about?

First of all, people seem genuinely surprised to discover that Benedictines do not take vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. If we don't take those vows, then what do we promise in their stead?

The better-known vows of poverty, chastity and obedience came centuries after Saint Benedict outlined the three commitments that we Benedictines do make. In the first of them, *conversio morum*, we promise to live a monastic manner of life. That includes life in community, simplicity in our life-style and a balance of prayer and work.

The second vow, obedience, can seem straightforward, but it is more nuanced than you might expect. What it is *not* is blind obedience to an arbitrary authority. What it really *is* is thoughtful obedience to the abbot, who is our father and whom we believe holds the place of Christ in our lives.

The third vow, stability, is the real puzzler. What is it and why is it such a big deal for Saint Benedict? Well, the logic behind it is simple. Unlike those religious orders which organize themselves into provinces that allow superiors to shift personnel to suit the need, we monks commit ourselves to life in a particular community, in a particular place, and we do so for life. Benedict prescribes this because his paradigm for monastic life is the family. In this family the abbot is father and the monks are brothers to each other. In one another we strive to see the face of Christ, and we support one another in the life-long search for God.

Within these parameters Benedictines seek to grow, and we hope to grow in many ways. To cite but one example, experience taught Benedict that we all must face our personal demons, and if monks try to escape then the demons are sure to follow. It's better to confront them headlong with the help of many

brothers. In that struggle monks are accountable to one another, and in a stable community there is potential for measured growth as well as measured backsliding. But as a family we help one another deal with the challenges of life.

There is no denying the occasional inefficiencies in this way of life, and unequal distribution of talents among monasteries can be one of them. At Saint John's we've been blessed to have several gifted organists over the years, as well as several monks who love woodworking. By contrast, for generations we've been short of plumbers. Despite that, we thank God for whatever talents that monks have, and we make the most of the opportunity.

There is also a certain culture that stability can create in a community. Visitors usually find monasteries to be well-tended, serene, and lovely places, and the reason for this owes something to our vow of stability. We live here for life, and if we trash the place then we are stuck with it. So we cultivate a reverence for the land, for the buildings, and for the landscape; and we do so in the conviction that these will shape the kind of lives we will lead.

Creating a place that shows God's work among us takes daily effort. Failure is not an option, because if we leave the place a dump then the next generation will rightly scold us for poor stewardship.

Finally, our culture tends to prize escapism and a wanderlust that discourages the formation of rooted communities. That's a subject for another day, but it is something that we should mull over nonetheless. Civilization in the monastery depends on the willingness of monks to live and work together in harmony, both for their own sakes as well as for the sake of generations to come. For that very reason I suggest that stability may be something we want to cultivate not only in monasteries, but also in our homes, neighborhoods, cities and even countries. From experience monks can tell you that it can actually be a force for good.

Find Father Eric's weekly blog at
<https://monkschronicle.wordpress.com>

Rejuvenated by the Holy Spirit

Pentecost arrived, for the disciples, after fifty days of uncertainty. True, Jesus had risen. Overjoyed, they had seen him, listened to his words and even shared a meal with him. Yet they had not overcome their doubts and fears: they met behind closed doors, uncertain about the future and not ready to proclaim the risen Lord (Jn 20:19-26). Then the Holy Spirit comes and their worries disappear. Now the apostles show themselves fearless, even before those sent to arrest them. They had been worried about saving their lives; now they are unafraid of dying.

Earlier, they had huddled in the Upper Room; now they go forth to preach to every nation. Before the ascension of Jesus, they waited for God's kingdom to come to them (*Acts 1:6*); now they are filled with zeal to travel to unknown lands. Before, they had almost never spoken in public, and when they did, they had often blundered, as when Peter denied Jesus; now they speak with boldness to everyone. The disciples' journey seemed to have reached the end of the line, when suddenly they were *rejuvenated by the Spirit*. Overwhelmed with uncertainty, when they thought everything was over, they were transformed by a joy that gave them a new birth. The Holy Spirit did this.

How does he do this? Consider the Apostles. The Holy Spirit did not make things easier for them, he didn't work spectacular miracles, he didn't take away their difficulties and their opponents. Rather, the Spirit brought into the lives of the disciples a harmony that had been lacking, his own harmony, for he *is harmony*.

Harmony within human beings. Deep down, in their hearts, the disciples needed to be changed. Their story teaches us that even seeing the Risen Lord is not enough, unless we welcome him into our hearts. It is no use knowing that the Risen One is alive, unless we too live as risen ones. It is the Spirit who makes Jesus live within us; he raises us up from within. That is why when Jesus appears to his disciples, he repeats the words, "Peace be with you!" and bestows the Spirit. That is what peace really is, the peace bestowed on the Apostles. That peace

Pope Francis



does not have to do with resolving outward problems – God does not spare his disciples from tribu-

lation and persecution. Rather, it has to do with receiving the Holy Spirit. The peace bestowed on the apostles, the peace that does not bring freedom *from* problems but *in* problems, is offered to each of us. Filled with his peace, our hearts are like a deep sea, which remains peaceful, even when its surface is swept by waves. It is a harmony so profound that it can even turn persecutions into blessings.

Yet how often we choose to remain on the surface! Rather than seeking the Spirit, we try to keep afloat, thinking that everything will improve once this or that problem is over, once I no longer see that person, once things get better. But to do so is to stay on the surface: when one problem goes away, another arrives, and once more we grow anxious and ill at ease. Avoiding those who do not think as we do will not bring serenity. Resolving momentary problems will not bring peace. What makes a difference is the peace of Jesus, the harmony of the Spirit.

At today's frenzied pace of life, harmony seems swept aside. Pulled in a thousand directions, we run the risk of nervous exhaustion and so we react badly. We look for the quick fix, popping one pill after another to keep going, one thrill after another to feel alive. But more than anything else, we need the Spirit, who brings order to our frenzy. The Spirit is peace in the midst of restlessness, confidence in the midst of discouragement, joy in sadness, youth in aging, courage in the hour of trial. Amid the stormy currents of life, he lowers the anchor of hope.

The Consoler brings us the tender love of God. Without the Spirit, our Christian life unravels, lacking the love that brings everything together. With-

The Holy Spirit does not bring only harmony *within us* but also *among us*. He makes us Church, building different parts into one harmonious edifice. Saint Paul explains this well when, speaking of the Church, he often repeats a single word, "variety": *varieties of gifts, varieties of services, varieties of activities*" (1 Cor 12:4-6). We differ in the variety of our qualities and gifts. The Holy Spirit distributes them creatively, so that they are not all identical. On the basis of this variety, he builds unity. From the beginning of creation, he has done this. Because he is a specialist in changing chaos into cosmos, in creating harmony. He is a specialist in creating diversity, enrichment, individuality. He is the creator of this diversity and, at the same time, the one who brings harmony and gives unity to diversity. He alone can do these two things.

In today's world, lack of harmony has led to stark divisions. There are those who have too much and those who have nothing, those who want to live to a hundred and those who cannot even be born. In the age of the computer, distances are increasing: the more we use the social media, the less social we are becoming. We need the Spirit of unity to regenerate us as Church, as God's People and as a human family. May he regenerate us! There is always a temptation to build "nests", to cling to our little group, to the things and people we like, to resist all contamination. It is only a small step from a nest to a sect, even within the Church. How many times do we define our identity in opposition to someone or something!

The Holy Spirit, on the other hand, brings together those who were distant, unites those far off, brings home those who were scattered. He blends different tonalities in a single harmony, because before all else he sees goodness. He looks at individuals before looking at their mistakes, at persons before their actions. The Spirit shapes the Church and the world as a place of sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. These nouns come before any adjectives.

Without the Spirit, the Church becomes an organization, her mission becomes propaganda, her communion an exertion.

Nowadays it is fashionable to hurl adjectives and, sadly, even insults. It could be said that we are living in a culture of adjectives that forgets about the nouns that name the reality of things. But also a culture of the insult as the first reaction to any opinion that I do not share. Later we come to realize that this is harmful, to those insulted but also to those who insult. Repaying evil for evil, passing from victims to aggressors, is no way to go through life. Those who live by the Spirit, however, bring peace where there is discord, concord where there is conflict. Those who are spiritual repay evil with good. They respond to arrogance with meekness, to malice with goodness, to shouting with silence, to gossip with prayer, to defeatism with encouragement.

To be spiritual, to savor the harmony of the Spirit, we need to adopt his way of seeing things. Then everything changes: with the Spirit, the Church is the holy People of God, mission is not proselytism but the spread of joy as others become our brothers and sisters, all loved by the same Father. Without the Spirit, though, the Church becomes an organization, her mission becomes propaganda, her communion an exertion. Many Churches spend time making pastoral plans, discussing any number of things. That seems to be the road to unity, but it is not the way of the Spirit; it is the road to division. The Spirit is *the first and last need of the Church* (Saint Paul VI, *General Audience*, 29 November 1972). He "comes where he is loved, where he is invited, where he is expected" (Saint Bonaventure, *Sermon for the Fourth Sunday after Easter*).

Brothers and sisters, let us daily implore the gift of the Spirit. Holy Spirit, harmony of God, you who turn fear into trust and self-centeredness into self-gift, come to us. Grant us the joy of the resurrection and perennially young hearts. Holy Spirit, our harmony, you who make of us one body, pour forth your peace upon the Church and our world.

Holy Spirit, make us builders of concord, sowers of goodness, apostles of hope.



The Oblate

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

JUNE 2020 VOLUME 64, NUMBER 2

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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Mark Your Calendar

July 17-19, 2020: Annual Oblate Retreat

Be aware that we will try Zoom for the conferences.

November 15, 2020: Fall Day of Reflection

Let us pray that we can meet in person.



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