

Benedictine Oblates of
The World Community for
Christian Meditation

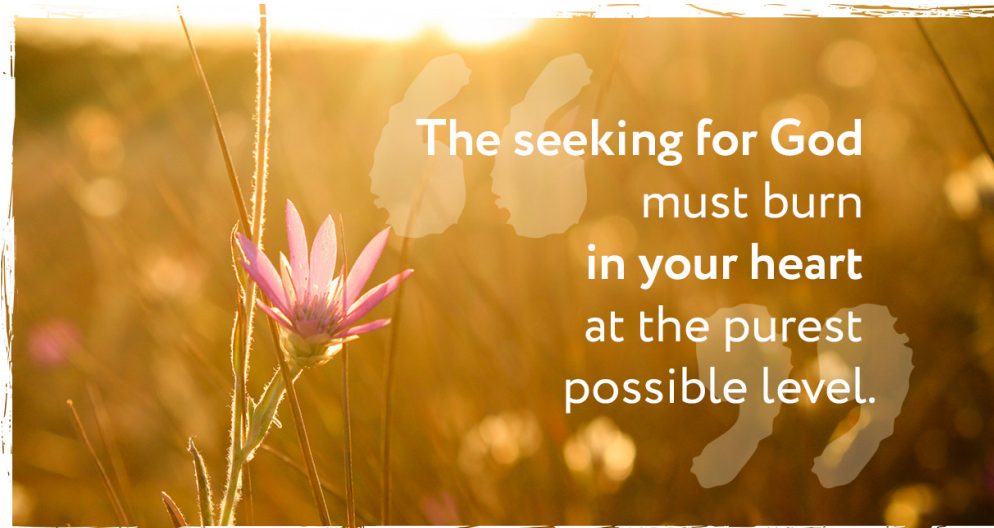
30 Years of the founding
of WCCM
MEMORIAL EDITION

MONACHOS
by Laurence Freeman

(For the full version of this talk see
the Benedict's Well recording 20 September 2021)

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Only in union
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John Main
Word Into Silence

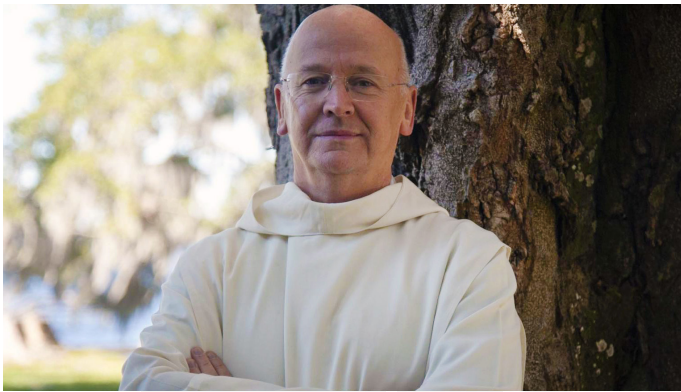


The first chapter of the Rule of St Benedict is about the different kinds of monks. Benedict has a long tradition behind him about this. Monachus in Greek meant hermit, or a solitary. It also contains the meaning of oneness or wholeness. Of course, there are good and not so good and bad monks. Benedict seems to think the two best kinds are the hermits and the coenobites who live in community and have an abbot and a rule. The bad kinds ('sarabaites' and 'gyrovages') who call themselves monks but are really self-seeking and self-centred. In the earlier tradition there was another kind who live a religious life in the world but otherwise are not distinct externally from those around them. I see our oblates as another kind of monk particularly relevant to the circumstances and needs of our time.

So, what is a monk? Many questions follow this. Someone who 'truly seeks God', as Benedict says? John Main says a sad monk is a contradiction in terms. Does that mean whenever you're sad you aren't a monk? Which came first: hermit or coenobite? Which is better? In St Athanasius' 'Life of St Anthony' he starts off as a hermit, goes into deep solitude

The World
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I found this quite reassuring. But it's a long road. Can we measure progress? John Main said that we can but only by the quality of love that we bring to all our relationships which, he said, showed the marvellous practicality of the Rule. (See Community of Love, p.60).



but emerges mature and whole devoting the rest of his life to healing the sick, comforting the sorrowful and reconciling the divided. So it's impossible to put the same timeframe or sequence on every monk's life. You just have to be yourself and make the whole of your life a seeking for God.

I think the oblate expresses something intrinsic about the monk. Instead of trying to define it, let's say the monk is conscious of having an ultimate goal and meaning; and so, everything in his or her life is directed towards spiritual progress within each one's unique situation. This is universal. But as the monk (or oblate) shows there are specific characteristics of life that they take seriously and love. Meditation daily, the Hours and Lectio and reading of the Rule and open sharing in community or a 'cell' about what the vows mean and how you are doing with them.

The seeking for God must burn in your heart at the purest possible level. It is stronger than the sense of failure. Failure, then, just makes you humble and you easily avoid self-rejection. A monk becomes a person of peace and a messenger of peace. As oblates you bring this gift of peace, from this deep place in yourself, the peace for which the world thirsts, to family, friends and work and the ways you share in the life and work of the community.

Laurence

When I made my monastic profession, I was told by an old monk: 'today you're just starting. It will take you ten years to become a monk.'



Preface

WORD INTO SILENCE

by John Main OSB

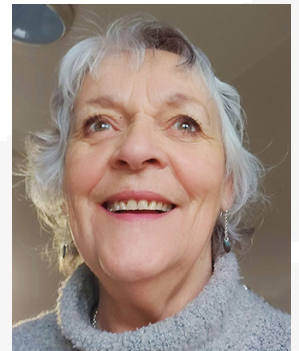


“The beauty of the Christian vision of life is its vision of unity. It sees that all mankind has been unified in the One who is in union with the Father. All matter, all creation, too, is drawn into the cosmic movement towards unity that will be the realisation of the Divine Harmony. This is not an abstract vision. It is filled with a deep personal joy because within the value of each person is affirmed. No unique beauty will be lost in this great unification but each will be brought to fulfilment in all. In union we become who we are called to be. Only in union do we know fully who we are.”



MESSAGE FROM EILEEN DUTT,
International Oblate Co-Ordinator

Meet “Scrubby” it’s the name I have given a bough brought down in a storm several years ago – or so the story goes. It fell in this position and that’s how it has remained since. It’s lovely to think the freak strike of wind that tore “Scrubby” from the main trunk turned out to be



providential for local community. On the tree it was one bough amongst many, hidden yet clearly dying - evidence is clear on other side. The way it fell has given it a new form and I am learning it is one loved by the locals! As one person put it to me when they passed by as I was taking this photo (in the indomitable accent of this area): “Ay, lass! Tha can tak tha snaps but that ere clump of wood - that looks more like a wild cat -



is summat special. I’ve watched bairns playing ‘side it, takking to it. Adults stop to look at it. Been like that for years. Uncanny!”

I like that it landed next to a stream of fresh water in a position where it catches the first light of each new day and where, over

the course of each year, changes in the seasons are evident in the flora and fauna all necessary players in a healthy ecosystem. And to think that at a time when care of the environment is high on the international agenda this broken bough, in a voice that beyond words, invites all who pass by to pause, look and see - means a lot.

This led me to ponder something from Barbara Brown Taylor’s book ‘Learning to Walk in the Dark’. “The good news is that dark and light, faith and doubt, divine absence and presence, do not exist at opposite poles. Instead, they exist with and within each other, like the distinct waves that roll out of the same ocean and roll back into it again.

As different as they are, they come from and return to the same source.” Food for thought!

Thank you all for making our Oblate Retreat a visible, Spirit filled, sign, of our vibrant and diverse Community of Love. It truly was an astonishing, inspired and filled with the Spirit, weekend culminating with a beautiful Contemplative Eucharist on Feast of St Benedict. And, once again, a very special thank you to members of the planning team, to all who helped make the liturgies personal to Oblates and to our prior Laurence for giving us so much of time: one on one meetings with each of the 12 novices waiting Final Oblation; focused time with postulants, novices and mentors, daily talks, prayers and meditation and, of course, for celebrating the Eucharist with us and for us. Wonderful!

In July the Oblate Council celebrated its first year! Our first task was to look at updating oblate documentation and then we agreed to plan for an Oblate Retreat – this year we will be looking at formation. We will be using questions shared both before, and during, the Mentors session as an initial guide. We are also looking at creating – with the help of Adriano Massi – a new master oblate database. Thank you NOC’s for all that you do by way of looking after your national database for us. It means a lot.

Benedict’s Well. Looking at the numbers attending live sessions – and later views – this is now our main, international, area of outreach. I have managed to obtain – either from Speakers or the small team of oblates who look after transcribing for us, copies of most of the talks. I pass these to Aileen Urquhart, UK Oblate, to add to the BW booklet she is creating. At some point we will look at making this available in hard copy.

It was a sad moment for me when I learned our dear Trish Panton, our first International Oblate Coordinator, had made her final journey home, May she rest in peace and rise in full glory. I am sure the angels were there to meet to her and welcome home a true and faithful servant!

**TRIBUTE TO TRISH PANTON,
May she Rest in Peace and rise in Glory,
by Judi Taylor, Oblate in Sydney, Australia**

Trish Panton was the International Oblate Coordinator for 12 years and for many years was the Australian Oblate Coordinator. Her loving guidance, her leadership and wisdom has given encouragement and inspiration to so many of us. We give thanks

for her life of dedicated, generous, compassionate service to all on this path. She exemplified courage, perseverance, unswerving attention, unflagging effort and gracious acceptance of any responsibility or task placed before her.

Her dedication to raising awareness of and supporting Oblates throughout the world has been a unifying force within the Oblate community at large. She remains a faithful and loving presence to us all, a shining light that shows us the true meaning of living in and for the love of Christ, embodying the Rule of St Benedict, as summarised in that beautiful line from our closing prayer: “to serve all who come, and to receive them as Christ Himself”. Her tireless commitment to building John Main’s vision of our community of love is a profound testament to the power of that ‘moment of Christ’ that has changed all of our lives.



So many oblates mentored over so many years, and more yet! Prior to and since the First World Congress of Benedictine Oblates held in September, 2005, in Rome, Trish has at each congress, been a committed presence opening this way to many and representing and interpreting our Monastery without Walls to the wider Oblate world. She passed to the Lord on 2nd August 2021. Rest in peace with your Beloved, dear Trish.

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“HASTENING TOWARD OUR HEAVENLY HOMELAND” (RB 73),

Editorial by Stefan Reynolds



Welcome to this edition of Via Vitae celebrating 30 years of WCCM, the monastery without Wall to which and in which we belong. This edition of Via Vitae offers many testimonies from Oblates, from early days right up to those who took postulancy or final Oblation at the online International Oblate retreat in July. We can read about their journeys. The first Oblates were accepted by John Main in 1977 in the Priory at Montreal but John Main always understood it as an international community. In 1981, when WCCM was founded at the John Main Seminar at New Harmony, with the encouragement and wisdom of Fr Bede Griffiths, the Oblates found a new home also. One that eminently suited the international character of the Oblates who had joined at the Priory Montreal. In 1977 the first three Oblates were Lady Rosie Lovat from an aristocratic Scotch family, a young Portuguese immigrant recently arrived in Canada (and who later was at Fr John's deathbed) and Bishop Henry Hill, an Anglican Bishop from Ontario, Canada. So from the very beginnings the Oblates were a diverse and ecumenical community. Soon others joined, some of whose stories you can read in this Newsletter: Polly Schofield (whom we heard from recently in Benedict's Well), Greg Ryan from the US, Magda Jass from Hungary, but living in Canada with her husband Fred (who also spoke recently in Benedict's Well). This edition of Via Vitae also remembers Trish Panton, who became the International Oblate co-ordinator soon after the foundation of WCCM.

Due to the fullness of this edition of Via Vitae – a pumper edition! – we will be focus more of the online International Oblate retreat we had in July in the next Newsletter. The next Newsletter, at the beginning of 2022, will also focus on the Climate Crisis and Oblate's responses to that. For now, to celebrate 30 years of WCCM, remembering the wonderful Oblates from the early days, those like Trish Panton who was so important to the community in its growth, and the new Oblates who have joined recently, is what this Edition of Via Vitae is dedicated to. Sit back and enjoy the testimonies, articles, poems and reflections

that show the vibrancy and variety of the Oblate community, thirty years on after it found its home as Oblates of WCCM.

TESTIMONIES

A BEGINNER'S BEGINNING, by Greg Ryan, Oblate since 1982, USA

I began corresponding with Thomas Merton's secretary, Brother Patrick Hart, in 1971. In the summer of 1977, Brother Pat, who knew of my interest in contemplative prayer, sent me mimeographed copies of the conferences that John Main had recently given to the community at the Abbey of Gethsemani. They



were soon serialized in Cistercian Studies Quarterly and later published as the now-classic Christian Meditation, The Gethsemani Talks. When I opened the mail, I immediately took a break from scraping and painting our house, sat down on the back step in the hot summer sun, and read the conferences straight through. I finally found what I had been looking for! The next day, my twice-daily practice began.

I started a correspondence with Father John at the time when he and Father Laurence were still living in the little house on Vendôme Avenue. I began receiving the monthly Newsletter that, just as today, carried news of the Community along with his inspiring teaching on the tradition and practice of Christian meditation. In the summer 1981, I boarded a train to Montreal. Over my two days' visit to the Priory, I was overjoyed to have several conversations with Father John and Father Laurence and other members of the Community who had recently moved into their new home on Pine Avenue West. During Vespers, I was received by Father John as an oblate novice, both of us signing the oblate commitment certificate that Polly Schofield had handwritten in her beautiful calligraphy.

I returned to the Priory the next summer. This time, Father John's health had been deteriorating and Father Laurence helped him out of bed so he could sit in a chair for a quiet conversation with me. He was

vibrant and engaging; his eyes a piercing blue. He asked about my family and encouraged me on the life-long commitment I was about to make. The next day, the Feast of St. Laurence, as preparations were finalized for my final oblation, Father Laurence brought Father John down from his room, seated in a wheel chair, vested for Mass. On the way into the meditation room I asked him if, afterwards, I could have a photo taken with him and he happily agreed. Sadly, that didn't happen. Toward the end of December, I received a phone call from the Priory informing me that Father John was making his final journey. Another call the next day explained that he had passed, surrounded by members of the Community.

The Holy Rule of St. Benedict, so grounded in Sacred Scripture, appealed to me - and does to this day - since it is written for women and men alike, whether lay people or ordained. Likewise, Father John's vision, sharpened and purified by daily meditation, included everybody, creating a true Community of Love. Forty years later, I am continually grateful for the simplicity of his teaching and for the help of the Community.

MY MOTIVATIONS AS POSTULANT, by Mariana More, Oblate Postulant from Mexico

For me... Meditation is a way of life. I started 10 years ago, learning from non-Christian traditions. It was a beautiful but lonely path. I used to experience religiosity and mysticism in a separate way. Now in the Community I see that these are two parts of the same thing. Since last year, thanks to three amazing people: my friend David Simpson, my teacher Enrique Lavín and my mentor Josefa Vivas, I began to discover the Community and the Oblate's path. For me, it was like arriving home; I felt the calling to be part of this family since day one. Through the daily discipline of



the Mantra and embracing the Benedictine way of life, I've discovered how to flow peacefully, trusting God is always in full command of my life.

I became a Postulant in July 2021, during the online International Oblate's Retreat. The moment is recorded in this photo which my mentor' Josefa took (bottom right with her camera)

I am growing, little by little, step by step, in obedience, humility, faith, patience... balance... love... in summary: true and everlasting happiness. As a Postulant I look forward to deepen my studies my practice, and share this way of life with everyone I can.

Please pray for me as I walk through this journey of discernment.

BECOMING A BENEDICTINE OBLATE WITH DOM JOHN MAIN OSB IN MONTREAL, by Magda Jass, Oblate from Canada



In 1977, when Fr. John came to Montreal, Sr. Eileen Byrne, who knew him from England, invited me when he gave his first talk. She and I were in the same prayer group where she made the announcement. Without understanding why, right away I knew this was what I had been waiting for. But The Spirit made sure by nudging me. My husband was a Knight of Columbus, and for the first few weeks Fr John and those who came with him, including Fr Laurence were staying at the rectory of the church where the KofC held their meetings. So we were invited there also to meet him. Then since I went to high school with the sisters of the Sacred Heart, they also put on a series of meetings with him, to which I was invited. So when the Benedictine Priory in Montreal opened its doors and started a regular meditation group led by Fr. John, on the first Monday in January 1978, I was there.

The house was old, in need of lots of repair. The furniture was stuff donated by people. As you came into the house, there were 2 rooms, one on the right and one on the left. There was a staircase going

upstairs. When you went further in, another room opened up straight ahead. Behind that on the left was the refractory, where they ate. and of that to the right was the kitchen. The private rooms were upstairs. However there was a secret staircase from upstairs to the kitchen, where sometimes Fr. John could show up suddenly.

At first the group met in that opened up room, with a few chairs and a red sofa with broken springs. A little later the room on the left opened, with meditation cushions and wooden straight back chairs around the perimeter. We would listen to Fr. John in the opened up room, and then go to the front left room to meditate. Later the front right became ready, and that became the official meditation room, and where he said Mass.

The liturgy of the hours was open to anybody, and as it was about 3km from our house, and walking distance, I often came for midday office. As I worked only part time, at times I would bring a big pot of soup or stuffed green peppers, or homemade jam.

Often there were guests. Lady Lovat, who would come for extended retreats. She would bake fresh bread every day, and she said her secret was to say Ma-Ra-Na-Tha while kneading. There was one day that the Dalai Lama visited. One day my husband and I went to a concert where Yehudi Menuhin was playing. I said to Fred, he plays like a meditator. Sure enough on Sunday when we went to mass, he was there. Justin Trudeau, our present prime minister, used to come to Sunday mass at times when he was a toddler, with his brother and father, who was then the prime minister.. and many more luminaries.

The Priory stayed in that house for three years. then moved to its new and bigger location Monday groups for 10 weeks minimum and advanced groups for the rest continued every week. We came in in silence. In the new house the talks and meditation were given in a basement room. Music was playing while we waited for Fr John. When he came in, he sat in his chair, and gave the teaching. then we meditated, and after there was time for questions. When the time was up, we departed again in silence.

I came to meditation with two major background influences. I was born in Budapest Hungary, in 1938. and had been traumatised in many ways. On the other hand, I had a grandfather who loved me unconditionally. Fr. John reminded me of him; tall, an authority figure, disciplined and utterly loving. I was sure if they would have known each other, they would have been friends. The trauma had several effects that were still characterizing me at the time,

but, in hindsight, those became graces to become an oblate. Going through the second world war at age 5, I learned to pay attention, to be silent and to be still. These responses were a matter of life or death. I learned to hide, not just physically but who I was, to the extent that I had no self-image at all. I heard adults use the words; liberation and peacetime. Therefore when Fr John talked about 'Liberty' and 'Peace' it was familiar! During our time of hiding during the war we spent time in a convent and time in a cave. Finding safety there I was very much prepared for 'the cave of the heart'!

Both my mother's and my life were saved miraculously many times. And, since about the age of three I felt God was with me. I remember coming to some conclusions about life: how bickering about status, belonging, or anything else was stupid. The only thing that mattered was survival, and you twisted yourself into whatever people expected, and kept your true self hidden. Therefore peace at any price. I became a peace-maker, always mediating between people. The buck stops with me. And in my family I hated to be the mediator, but that was my role. I wanted the truth, I did not want to be fooled even by myself, especially by myself. Therefore, for my studies I went into science, and when I met Fr John I was working at McGill University in an immunology research lab. Only Fr John's death changed my path to spiritual care giver in a hospital, at first in palliative care.

Back to becoming an oblate: Fr John spoke a lot about liberty, and the cave of the heart, about silence. I was told at age 6 that if anybody asks me anything, my answer is to say: «I don't know.» Only last year did I find out that that is a Sufi spiritual practice. It did cause a bit of trouble in grade school. Fr John said that, «meditation requires not less than everything.» Great another one of my faults of being an all or nothing person was an asset. Often I would not understand what he was saying, but it went straight to my heart. I was never a person of many words, but both Fr



John and Fr Laurence looked through me, and I did not have to give long explanations to be understood. Fr. John saw not what I presented to the world, but the very much alive passionate person I was. He talked to that inner child in me. And so after he started having oblates in 1980, I asked to be an oblate.

I became an oblate in May 1981, in the chapel of the Priory, received by Fr John. There was no formal mentoring. He knew me, saw through me, and we had one meeting about the oblation the week before it. I was at that time still very shy and self-conscious. As I was kneeling in the middle of the chapel with everyone watching, and Fr John saying the words. I was very uncomfortable being the centre of attention, and when I thought it was over, I fled back to my seat. Alas it was not, and so poor Fr John, without batting an eyelid, finished the ceremony over an empty predieu. How I have changed! And that is how I became an oblate of the Benedictine Priory of Montreal, I later transferred it to the Monastery without walls.



WHY I WANTED TO BECOME AN OBLATE, by Diogo Mizaël, Brazil



Oblation is a call from the Father, listening to him is an invitation to let oneself be transformed to the taste of the Spirit, cooked and offered on the altar of the world in honour of the One who loved us first.

Final oblation here I am! - I become salt!

MY OBLATION DAY, by Pan Austin, UK Oblate (pam@spinningschool.org)

‘May the sacredness of your work bring healing, light and renewal to those who work with you, and to those who see and receive your work...’ - Anam Cara, John O’Donohue, 1997 Bantam Books.

International Oblate Retreat 2021, and St Benedict’s day, and the day of my Final Oblation. My fellow oblates, mentor and people from the community that have assisted me on this journey will all ‘be’ there; but actually, they won’t. They will be eyes-on-screen at home. Most of them on their own, like me. And that doesn’t feel right for a major life event like this, the Day of my Final Oblation. So I planned a few little things to make it feel a bit more like the memorable occasion it actually is....

Purchased my own feast of fruit to mark the Feast of St Benedict, it was rather a lot for one person...

Back indoors, I burned some incense and displayed a meaningful card.



Also lit my special candle and kept it burning while preparing paperwork for the Oblation ceremony.



On Sunday I planted a rose called Claire Austin (no relation) and made jam with some of the fruit so that it was not wasted and carefully labelled it: 11th July 2021.



While I was sitting quietly in the garden on Sunday afternoon when the retreat was over, a Robin perched quite close by on my sundial. Unfortunately it didn’t stay for a photo, but its presence topped my efforts to make the Day of my Oblation feel special. It was the first robin I had seen in my garden for ages, and curiously enough, I haven’t seen one since...

MAKING MY OBLATION AT THE FIRST ZOOM INTERNATIONAL OBLATE RETREAT, by April Blackwell, Oblate, Melbourne, Australia

Last year, I was quite sure that I wanted to make my oblation with my oblate friends around me and so, with Gloria’s listening ear and suggestions (Australian Oblate Coordinator) planned many possible ways

that this could be achieved. Yet, somehow, I couldn't get the energy or the will to follow up on any of these possibilities. Of course, Covid 19 didn't help!

When I came home from hospital following treatment for pneumonia over Christmas, I was surprised to sense a surge of energy towards really wanting to make my Oblation as soon as possible. I felt ready, so, when the Oblate Retreat on Zoom was advertised, I decided to request that I be able to make my oblation in July 2021.

All the doors that had seemed closed before that were flung open and -I felt empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue my oblate journey. It felt right; like the culmination of many pointers along the way that I had been unaware of at the time, stretching back over thirty to forty years.

It was certainly an amazing and somewhat surreal experience to make my Oblation on Zoom! It seemed like an incredible technological feat to attempt to bring together oblates from so many countries to our beautiful home at Bonnevaux in France for this first Zoom Oblate Retreat! I felt a wonderful connection with those attending. It was moving to feel that we were invited into the meditation room at Bonnevaux. There was a space left in the centre front (as in the icon of the Trinity) for us to join in the circle.

The 24-hour Meditation on the Thursday preceding the Retreat was a privilege to take part in. I was blown away when I heard that there had been nearly 3000 people meditating from 37 countries!

The talks by Father Laurence were inspiring, and the sense of support from the committee was very much appreciated. Somehow, despite having to deal with any face to face and virtual human situations they also took all the technological side of things in their stride.

It was wonderful to be able to speak with Father Laurence before making my oblation and despite a couple of technical wobbles we were able to have a meaningful conversation.

I was pleased that I was awake at 2 am in Melbourne, Australia to make my Oblation along with 11 others around the world. We all read out our vows one by one from our parchment charts. Then we signed our names and put on our Benedictine crosses that had also been faithfully sent to us by our National Coordinators. I was pleased that I could write "On this eleventh day of July "at the top of my chart, the Feast Day of St Benedict.

I am thankful that we twelve will be put in touch with each other so that the bond we have will be strengthened.

In conclusion, I feel 'chuffed' to be the first Benedictine Oblate of the WCCM in Australia to make my oblation at the first International Zoom Oblate Retreat. With thanks to all involved in the organisation of the Retreat.

MY FINAL OBLATION, by Giovanni Giambalvo Dal Ben, Oblate in Italy

Today is 17 July 2021, just about two weeks after the ceremony of my oblation conducted by Father Laurence Freeman at the end of the silent retreat of the World Community for Christian Meditation at Monte Oliveto Maggiore. I am now sitting on the beach at Caletta, near Castiglioncello, with my wife Benedetta and our daughter Ester. We are watching an archetypical sunset. Wine red clouds float on the horizon, veiling a sun that is about to be swallowed up by the sea, leaving the stage to a pale moon, its twin



sister. An intrepid seagull, wheeling in fantastic circles in the infinite blue, glides over a slightly rippling sea, alights on a lone rock where it sits stone-like, proud, staring at the sunset, almost part of the rock. I have the feeling that it is inviting me to meditate, indeed I am convinced, so let's begin. When I open my eyes about fifteen minutes later the sun has gone down and the horizon is no longer visible, while sea and sky are covered in vivid pink flames. The seagull is still there, motionless, almost as if its meditation time is not yet over...as if this happens every day, who knows!?

The first voice to welcome me to the WCCM was that of Catherine Charriere. In August 2008 I had just returned from a week in the Merigar Centre for Tibetan

Dzog-Chen Buddhism, in the heart of Maremma - a corner of Tibet in Tuscany. I was having trouble with the practice and teaching of a catholic religion that seemed distant and artificial even though I had been brought up in that tradition. It was the few but essential words that I exchanged in a personal conversation with Lama Namkhai Norbu, spiritual guide of that Community, that opened my heart's eye and showed me the way back home. On getting back to Florence I looked for a telephone number for the Community for Christian Meditation. I rang it and Catherine answered. To my great surprise I discovered that the Centre in Florence was only two hundred meters from my home. I read all John Main's Word into Silence in one go and was struck dumb. At once I started to meditate with the mantra and for the first year I performed my daily practice, morning and evening.



I remember my delight in the first National Conference in Padova in 2008, led by a smiling Maria Grazia, the national coordinator. I owe her a lot, as does the whole Italian community, for my journey.

Later, I stumbled in my practice, ever more frequently, because I felt tired or discouraged, until there were moments when I stopped altogether. I kept telling myself it was because I had so much to do ... but this was really an excuse. I spoke to Father Laurence about this and he gave me the following precious advice: "Even if you find you can't meditate for 30 minutes twice a day, try to maintain two moments, at the beginning and the end of the day, in which you say the mantra, even for only a few minutes. This will help you to stay with the energy of the practice and on the path". He was right. Daily meditation became part of my life, enabling me to stay centred, or at least allowing me to recover the practice, even during the 'stormy' moments of life. In the words of the Psalm the discipline of the mantra has been "a lamp for my steps ... a light on the path."

Over time I have felt a sense of profound gratitude for the many gifts I have received, gifts that the practice of meditation has helped me comprehend. In this humus I formed the desire to start out on the path of oblation with the Community, to which I feel deeply indebted, hoping to be able to return some part of what I have received. Today I feel the full weight of the responsibility and the commitment of this decision, but also a great joy at being part of a great family that is following the same path, advancing in the furrow of Benedictine spirituality. A profound commitment, great joy, a huge challenge... that of bearing witness, credibly and joyfully, to the way of meditation as it has been taught by John Main and Laurence Freeman.

My thanks go to the seagull for showing me, silently, his own interpretation of the three principles an oblate should respect:

Stability, which is both physical and an inner stability, like fidelity to a place, a Community... a rock among many others, where one should be steadfast and unswerving whatever the pressure of the surrounding waves!

Obedience, meaning to learn to listen, in silence, the Word of Christ (who is the Word) who gives us life and enables us to fly: like the gull who, by following the winds and currents can defy the mysterious laws of aerodynamics.

Conversion, meaning to know how to change direction at sundown and meditate, to give daily thanks to the prime source of the life of the cosmos, in the full knowledge that the sunset (every sunset in fact) is only an apparent death, the necessary sacrifice for a new dawn or, if you prefer, a new resurrection! As John Main has written, each time we sit down to meditate we are invited to die to our own self importance, to egoism, to our limitations, so as to enter into the mystery of God and rise again to a new life for the community, for communion, for a life that is full and fearless.

I thank you solitary seagull for having shared your daily meditation with me!

THE OBLATION OF A DEACON, by Carlos Juarez, Oblate since 2018 and ordained Deacon last year, Argentina

Few times did I imagine living such strange and unusual times as the last year and a half.

Already being an Oblate, the pandemic appears in my life in the middle of the path towards diaconal ordination. At first, I must admit, I did not make a conscious union between these two states.

But today, a little over a year after my ordination, I must admit that this would not have been possible without the enormous teaching and discipline that the Oblate of the WCCM forged in me.

More than ten years have passed since the day that, from a public telephone, I called the National Coordinator, Marina Müller, to ask her ... what the meditation and the oblate of this «movement» unknown to me was about.

And in this elapsed time, everything is gain in the Lord.

Many things have happened, very good moments and others not so much; variety of encounters with other meditators; several trips to see Meditatio House and a thousand other anecdotes.

Today, on this anniversary of the WCCM, I want to say thanks to all my educators in the Community, for having made me a heart walker, to my Bishop Monsignor Paredes for respecting my times in this Community, and to Father Laurence because in every moment I felt his paternal and loving gaze.

Thank you WCCM, thank you community of Oblates... the man of God that I can be, it is thanks to you, to your love and patience.

With love in Jesus.



August 2018, Argentine WCCM retreat with 4 Final Oblations, from right to left: Fr. Laurence, Marina Müller Argentina NOC, Carlos Juarez, Juana Paez, Luis Álvarez Díaz, Raúl Pavón Coral.

MY OBLATE JOURNEY,

by Mary Durkan, became an Oblate in the UK in 1989

In the 1970s as a teenager I was exploring the call to monastic life. On a visit to a monastery not far from home I was discussing with one of the sisters my struggle to find a form of prayer that worked for me. Saying prayers wasn't enough and in my search I

had read quite a few books on ways to pray and found nothing that resonated with me. Sister listened to what I had to say and then told me to get hold of a copy of *The Cloud of Unknowing* and read it slowly.

I bought a copy, started to read a short section each day and a whole new world opened to me. 'Take a short word... And fix this word fast to your heart, so that it is always there come what may... With this word you will suppress all thought under the cloud of forgetting.' I chose my word and sat down to meditate. My journey had begun.

Fast forward to 1986 and I was in London staying at a convent of missionary sisters where my aunt was superior. A lot had happened in those intervening years. After graduating from university I had entered an enclosed, monastic community but in April 1986, after nearly seven years, the community decided that I should not make solemn profession and I went to my aunt's convent to stay until my temporary vows expired. I was utterly devastated and had no idea what my next step should be.

One day my aunt asked me to go and pick up a book she had ordered from the Christian Meditation Centre in Kensington. She had attended the official opening a few weeks earlier. Armed with my A to Z I set off on foot to 29 Campden Hill Road. The door was opened by a short, plump lady with a smiling face and after explaining my errand I was ushered in and taken downstairs to the community area where I was plied with tea and biscuits. Sr Madeleine Simon RSCJ told me about how she had come to the Centre and then as I had never heard about Fr John Main she told me a little about his life and work, the priory on Montreal and the purpose of the Meditation Centre. I was then shown round, given the book I had come to collect and, as I prepared to leave, Sr Madeleine said that I would be very welcome to join the community for meditation whenever I wished.

A few days later I went back for Evening Prayer and Meditation and gradually the frequency of my visits increased. The Centre was more peaceful and quiet than the convent, where there was a steady stream of sisters arriving from and departing to various parts of the world. And it was good to pray with other meditators.

It wasn't long before I was invited to join the little community at the centre as Fr Paul Geraghty was going back to the priory in Montreal and a replacement was needed. This seemed like a gentle push from the Holy Spirit, a glimmer of light in the midst of the darkness and uncertainty that had shrouded me ever since leaving the monastery. I made a retreat at Mount St

Bernard Abbey and discussed the idea with the monk who was my spiritual director and by the end of the retreat it was clear that this was what God wanted me to do next.

So in November, six months after leaving the monastery, I started the next stage of my journey and moved into 29, Campden Hill Road. I soon settled in and found a job to support myself and contribute to the house expenses. When not at work I began to help with the Tape Library, posting out tapes every month and checking them when they returned before sending them out to another borrower. Two meditation groups met at the centre every week, a beginners group on Mondays for those wanting to learn about meditation and a group for committed meditators on Wednesdays. After a few months of attending these groups Sr Madeleine asked me if I would like to take a turn at preparing talks and running some of the sessions. So began my role as a teacher of meditation.

On one of Fr Laurence's visits to London from Montreal the suggestion of becoming an Oblate was raised and after some thought and prayer we decided that I should start the journey which led to my Final Oblation on 26th February 1989.

I really enjoyed my time at the Meditation Centre with the little community comprising Sr Madeleine, Sr Isobel Paige RSCJ, from Canada and Lee Moy Ng, a Chinese Mauritian who worked at The Hammersmith Hospital as a paediatrician. I made frequent trips to Heathrow to meet people off flights from all over the world who were coming to spend a few days at the Centre and sometimes acted as an impromptu tour guide round London when I wasn't at work. I took my turn with the cooking and cleaning, helped with the organisation of weekend events that were frequently held at the centre, lent a willing ear to people who wanted a chat, welcomed the curious who came to find out what the centre was about and had some amazing sessions with groups of teenagers who came from schools around London as part of their religious education studies. And then there were all the people who came to meditate with us, Reg, Joyce, Anna, Rose, Hermione, Rosie and many more.

While I was living at the centre I met my husband John, who worked in London. He had no interest in meditation, and still hasn't, but regularly came to the centre after work, usually arriving just after meditation had just started. I would let him in and go back to the meditation room while he went downstairs and made a cup of tea. He would have a meal with us before going catch his train back to Gillingham, in Kent. Eventually the time came for me to move on again

when John and I decided to get married. During the first couple of years after we got married I was still able to visit the centre regularly. However, once our son was born John's job was relocated to the north west of England and we moved to Bolton. I had been working in a hospital pathology lab in Kent but had to leave because of the move. Had we stayed in Kent I would have been able to work from home until Matthew went to school, but this wasn't an option when we moved. I became a stay at home mum and as a result our financial situation was very difficult for several years until I could get another job in Bolton that fitted round Matthew's schooling. I could no longer afford to go to London and gradually lost contact with the Centre and the Oblate Community, though I did sometimes go to see John Cottling who lived on the south side of Manchester.

Throughout the next few years I continued to meditate alone, with varying degrees of fidelity. I was on the mailing list for Via Vitae so I had a little idea of how things were developing in the Oblate Community.



Three years ago I retired from work and thought about what I could do with the free time I suddenly had. Our Bishop had started a new three year programme of renewal in the diocese and in one of his pastoral letters had stressed the importance of prayer if the venture was to be successful. I approached our parish priest about stating a meditation group and he was very supportive. I actually started two, one on a Monday afternoon and another on a Thursday evening. Once the groups got going I made contact with the WCCM regional coordinator and let her know about the new groups.

When the on line cell meetings started up I wanted to get involved but the time clashed with our Sunday Mass and my duties as a Eucharistic Minister. I also felt rather awkward about joining in things after such

a long absence. Then the pandemic started and that was what finally pushed me to get back in touch with the Oblate Community I had exiled myself from for so many years. I was bowled over by the loving welcome this lost sheep received on returning to the fold. It is a source of great joy to see how the Oblate community has grown and developed over the years. When I made my Final Oblation I joined a very small community confined to just a few countries and with the priory in Montreal at its centre. Now the Oblate community is truly world-wide and all-embracing, reflecting the even larger community of WCCM meditators, with a new international centre in Bonnevaux which it shares with the much larger WCCM community. It was so lovely to see the blue cross from the front door of 29 Campden Hill Road, which I polished many times while living at the centre, installed at Bonnevaux. Perhaps one day I will get to polish it again!

THE JOURNEY HOME, by Eilish Tennent, Oblate in Ireland

To begin at the beginning: the journey of a lifetime started in 1970 when I first attended the 'School of Philosophy and Economic Science' in Dublin, looking for the answers to my many questions regarding existence. I spent almost twenty years there. During that time I was introduced to meditation in the Eastern Tradition. Other disciples practiced included attention, awareness and coming to one's senses in the present moment.

Next milestone in my life was discovering Christian Meditation. One day my attention was captured by a poster announcing four talks on Christian Meditation. The speaker was a certain Fr Laurence Freeman. The poster was in a Church. I was amazed. The last talk was that evening at a venue close to my home in Dublin. So, I went along, more out of curiosity than out of anything else. The experience felt like a homecoming. The next day Fr Laurence was due to visit Glendalough, an ancient monastic site in County Wicklow. I followed him there!

I was determined to find out all I could about meditation in the Christian tradition. My main concern was what to do about the mantra I had been using for years, which was not specifically from the Christian tradition. He assured me it was not a problem, just keep saying it. Fr Laurence was familiar with the philosophy school I was attending, as there was a branch of it in London. Both of us were acquainted with members there. That was another surprise!

I don't recall precisely the moment when I made the decision to become an Oblate. Sometime in 1983. Fr Laurence was still in Montreal. Later, when he transferred to the Olivetan Benedictines in Cockfosters, London, Oblates were invited to join the recently founded World Community as a monastery without walls, if they so wished. That was what I did.

As I approach my 83rd birthday at the time of this Via Vitae newsletter I have been reflecting on my journey so far. Saying the mantra has been the most important activity of my life, although hard work a lot of the time! I am comforted by the wise words of Abba Agathon, one of the Desert Fathers: "Prayer," he says, "is warfare to the last breath!"

"God is love," but what does that mean? I wish I knew. Fr Laurence referred to attention being akin to God. I reason that giving attention is love. And then – remembering that we are not the one who is giving attention, love is working within us. Jesus said, "I am the vine, you are the branches." Christian Meditation is opening us to the source of our being through the consciousness of Christ, which flows into us from his root connection with the Father. It is letting love be love in us. The trunk is still but the branches reach out to the light and dance in the wind. It is this rising of love that I feel T.S. Eliot wrote about when he said, "So the darkness shall be the light and the stillness the dancing."

It has been a wonderful journey but, to end, I must confess I have cried a lot along the way!

ARTICLES

ITALIAN NATIONAL OBLATES RETREAT

1-4 July 2021 (Possagno, Treviso)

As soon as the pandemic conditions allowed us, we organized the first retreat in presence of this "out of the ordinary" 2021. The Oblates Retreat is open to all meditators and people in a sincere path of research, of course, and this time we had almost 35 participants gathering in the beginning of July in Possagno (on the Veneto green hills: Antonio Canova was born there and there's a Museum dedicated to him).

Don Alfredo Jacopozzi, an oblate of our community himself, held a series of four lectures on the theme: "In the beginning was the Joy. The Conversion of our images of God". We developed that theme and kept

his teachings in our hearts (not in our minds) during the sessions of meditation, the Divine Office, the meditative walks. And the silence we guarded during



those four days helped in making us more alert and in re-evaluating our images of God, by asking ourselves if we project those images on other people as well. It has been a good exercise - good work - sometimes hard, sometimes revealing aspects of our own identity and true self.

With the Rule of Saint Benedict as a guide, two more postulants (Silvia and Marco) and two novices (Enos and Giuseppe) were accepted in the community, while, in that very same weekend, Giovanni Giambalvo Dal Ben was making his final oblation with father Laurence in Monte Oliveto.

The small ceremonies during the retreat have been simple but touching: you could tell that from the silence full of meaning that characterized them. With these new entries, the Italian oblate community reaches more than 10 members and these fruits of the Spirit are due also to the hard work of Giovanni Foffano, the national oblate coordinator. His dedication and his monthly online invite to the Italian cell has helped in creating a deeper connection between the community



members and in spreading the possibility of an "old and always new path" in the footsteps of our Father, Saint Benedict.

The retreat was also the perfect opportunity to present the newly published book "Comunità di amore", comprising of a few significant chapters in Italian of the larger volume "Community of Love" by John Main.

Translation of some impressions written by one of the participants

Original version in Italian here:

<https://wccmitalia.org/principio-la-gioia-ritiro-degli-oblati-1-4-luglio-2021/>

First the heel, then the toe. The right toe. Then again the heel and the toe. The left one now. Slowly, consciously. And then again, we repeat these actions. Consciously. Trying to be attentive, indeed, TO BE ATTENTION. Attention to the moment of suspension between one step and the other. Between one breath and another. Recognizing and letting go of thoughts and emotions. Walking meditation is always an amazing exercise. Paying attention to the surprise of a common action. Yet it is an underrated exercise that is nice to resume in a meditative retreat in silence...

It almost seems strange to find ourselves meditating together. In an in-person retreat. A space of time dedicated to contemplation, to meditation. To the tiring silence and Opus Dei. Almost absurd, after the restrictions of recent months, to choose to «confine» ourselves in a space and in a daily discipline.

Yet slowly we recognized our true selves, old friends and new faces, and we searched for our unique selves. Between different sensitivities, needs and difficulties that slowly melted to leave space, an open and empty self. Open to what? To whom?

The first retreat in the presence of 2021 organized by the Italian Community for Christian Meditation - WCCM Italia in Possagno (TV) was held in the first four days of July, in a pleasant cool climate characterized by a luxuriant green (the colour of hope). The annual Oblate Retreat was titled In the beginning was the joy. The Conversion: of our image of God. (<https://wccmitalia.org/ritiro-oblati-2021/>) A retreat open to meditators, old and new, and to all those who recognize themselves in a dimension of silence and spiritual research. We were 35 meditators this year.

Starting from one of the three precepts to which the oblates are called (Conversion), Don Alfredo Jacopozzi, a university professor and an oblate himself, guided us in a roundup of possible images of the Divinity. As Christians, but even before that as

human beings, we are called to constantly question ourselves, without getting tired, about what our image of God is. Have we internalized a God as Judge? A God that is a Boss? Or are we trying to rely on a Merciful God? To a Hidden God to be continually discovered with wonder, or to a God we already think we know and who dictates our morality (or, perhaps, our moralism)?

Don Alfredo's four conferences have nourished our reflections, mainly on an intellectual level, but the centre of a retreat characterized in this way is Silence, and times of meditation and prayer, communal and individual, the community recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours, the listening to sister religious traditions.

And all these components harmonized with each other. It is nice, from time to time, to rediscover the dimension in which humanity is called to expand. A dimension in which body, soul and spirit dance harmoniously with each other, giving themselves the right, rhythmic, spaces.

In recent months, the Italian Oblate community has grown, fuelled by monthly meetings, in awareness and in number. Two new postulants (Marco and Silvia) and two novices (Giuseppe Lumetta and Enos



Mantoani) joined the oblate "cell" in the footsteps of the Holy Father Benedict in this retreat. Another, Giovanni Giambalvo Dal Ben, made his final oblation in Monte

Oliveto with Father Laurence Freeman.

The small welcome ceremonies were meaningful, communal, and moving. So the slow, individual steps, being aware of the distances between us, motionless in movement, are the metaphor that best describes how this retreat was: a journey towards our very essence, through stillness.

VIRTUAL CELLS FOR LATIN AMERICAN SPANISH SPEAKING OBLATES,

by Marina Müller 2021, NOC Argentina

I met Father Laurence for the first time on the occasion of the launch of his first book translated into Spanish by Magdalena Puebla, in April 2005, in the city where I live, Buenos Aires, Argentina, South America. The book was Jesus the teacher within. I

immediately linked up with Magdalena, who began to spread Christian meditation widely in Argentina with the collaboration of Juana Paez (now also an Oblate) and myself.

I started to find out about the Oblate path in 2009, based on an article by Stefan Reynolds. My mentor was Trish Panton whom I met personally in 2011, a month before my Final Oblation, traveling to Sydney with two other meditators... a trip around the world: from Buenos Aires to London to stay for a week in Meditatio House, then Sydney after 23 hours by plane! On that occasion in Sydney we were able to share a cell meeting with some Australian Oblates, it was a very deep and moving experience that strengthened my path, with Trish and Penny Sturrock among others.

In November 2011 I made my Final Oblation as the first Argentine oblate during a retreat of about 110 attendants offered by Fr. Laurence in Córdoba, Argentina. After another retreat of Fr. Laurence in 2012, the convocation to the Oblate path was expanded in my country, with various interested seekers entering the path.

In Argentina, my country, we began to hold virtual cells every two months, from the beginning of 2013, on Saturdays or Sundays, from 10am to 5pm. We shared our spiritual path and also had lunch and tea together.

Those of us who lived nearby met: Juana Paez and her husband Luis Álvarez, Carlos Juárez, myself, and Norberto Ramírez who also attended, traveling from the city of Mar del Plata (about 400 kilometers!).

In March 2020, a very difficult stage began in my country, and it was intensifying around the world after the emergence of Covid 19 in China. We had to isolate ourselves in our homes, face-to-face meetings were interrupted, even churches closed to offer only virtual masses... and face-to-face cells stopped.

As of February 2018, we had begun to offer virtual cells from Argentina for the Spanish-speaking Latin American Oblate. We do them every two months, on Saturday mornings, for 3 hours. Starting in 2021, we prepare the Cells in conjunction with Oblate Coordinators from other Latin American countries (Colombia, Paraguay, Venezuela) and we invite not only those of us who walk the Oblate path, but also



meditators who sympathize with this path. Thus, we have 20 or more people at each meeting.

The good thing about this situation is that we expanded the cells to more people, and that we have the opportunity to communicate with those of us who live in distant countries: from Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Venezuela, Uruguay. Also eventually Spain and Spanish-speaking residents of the United States.

As the International Oblate Retreat of July 2021 did not have simultaneous translation, we resolved to offer in the successive cells, and in the annual Spanish-speaking Latin American Oblate Retreat, content translated into Spanish from said meeting.

Thus, for cell No. 15, on August 14, 2021, Elba Rodríguez (NOC Colombia) and I (NOC Argentina) prepared John Main's text on John Cassian, and that of the Oblate Path. Both were subjects of the cell meetings led by Stefan Reynolds during the International Retreat. During the cell we meditate in two moments, with a brief bodily preparation guided with an Oblate, we share excerpts from the selected texts, we read a paragraph from the Gospel of the day, and we briefly share about our personal and community Oblate journey.

These encounters nurture our journey, and strengthen our community and our vocation of service. Meetings of joy and gratitude.



image of Bonnevaux

GROWING IN A COMMUNITY OF LOVE AS WCCM BENEDICTINE OBLATES,

by Nick and Linda Polaschek, NZ Oblates

For monks the purpose of their Benedictine commitment is to 'progress in this way of life' through developing in relationships of love with

one another, their fellow monks who are all sharing a similar commitment within the enclosed monastic community (Rule: Prologue). What meaning does this have for a lay Oblate who is not residing in a monastic community, but living in ordinary society, endeavouring to follow the Benedictine way? Most of the Rule relating to communal living is not directly applicable to them. What is the community by which they, through their relationships, 'progress in this way of life'? How does their pattern of relationships enable their development, given most of those they relate to do not share in an explicit meditative Benedictine spirituality?

The meditative Oblate is typically engaged with a variety of communities. Most Oblates are part of a family, some single, some in partnerships (where the partner may or, more often, may not be a meditator). Some have secular work or leisure groups they are involved with. Many are involved with a church community, all are involved with Christian Meditation (CM) and the Oblate community within that. John Main affirmed that 'Meditation creates community'. What does this mean for the meditative Oblate who already lives in various communities?

This article is based on conversations with 12 individuals from among the 40 WCCM Oblates currently living in New Zealand. Mostly retired, living in different life situations, about half of those participating came from the Roman Catholic tradition, half from other Christian traditions, many having in their past moved among different spiritualities and traditions. Participants' length of meditative Oblate experience ranged from a few years to several decades. In these conversations the participants discussed the various ways in which their meditative Benedictine Oblate commitment is influenced by and influences their pattern of relationships in their lives within the communities in which they are involved. From reflecting on these recorded conversations several common themes became apparent, about how, by their way of living, they express their meditative Oblate vocation, seek wholeness as human beings in accord with the divine intention through living in relationships of love with others.

Collectively those who participated offer some insights into the distinctive lay spirituality of the Benedictine meditative Oblate. Complementing teaching on meditative Oblation, this is a voice of meditative Oblates themselves (quotes from participants in italics).



INSIGHTS FROM THE CONVERSATIONS:

MEDITATION:

Beginning practising regular meditation was life changing for all participants, radically renewing their approach to their Christian life. For some participants CM was revelatory in itself, opening a whole new contemplative dimension in the Christian life they had never been taught about before, perhaps addressing a crisis in their Christian faith, often after exploring a variety of spiritual practices over time. Practising meditative prayer opened them to the depth of the divine Mystery, as gracious divine concern and care for them as a person, making sense in a profound way of the Christian faith tradition in which they were brought up. 'Meditation teaches you about being'.

For other participants CM practice enabled a focussing and deepening of the meditative dimension already present in their life. For several, with some prior meditative experience in their Christian background, CM provided a clear method, supportive teaching and an interpretive framework for their meditative practice as a ongoing discipline within a Christian context, often re-enlivening their Christian faith. They were finally able to clearly and firmly locate their meditative experience within the Christian tradition they belonged to. 'Finding CM was like coming home'. For several with a longstanding practice in a non-Christian meditative tradition that was very significant for them, their adoption of CM enabled them to integrate this meditative experience into the Christian symbolic framework they had been brought up with.

Having found CM, participants ceased looking for another different path as they commonly had in the past. For all participants their meditation practice was experientially self-validating for them. They 'knew' within themselves they had found what they had always sought in their lives. Faithfully continuing on this way, they were confident their meditation practice would deepen their lives in Christ, supporting their gradual growth toward wholeness as human beings in accord with the divine intention. In this way meditation was both revelatory and transformative of their lives.

BEING AN OBLATE:

Moving from a personal meditative practice into being an Oblate based on the Rule of Benedict is not an obvious move, even though the WCCM Oblates are part of the CM community. The Rule itself focuses on collective recited prayer without reference to a personal meditative prayer discipline. Most meditators do not take this step. While a few moved more

quickly, for many participants, becoming an Oblate was commonly a process beginning after several years of meditative practice that then progressed over a number of years. For some, beginning to follow the Rule allowed them to share in the ideal of religious life that had always attracted them. The majority of participants in this study became meditative Oblates after it was suggested to them by another meditating Oblate.

While becoming a Benedictine Oblate was initially not obviously related to their meditation practice, for all participants this way of life was gradually discovered, through their involvement with certain people within CM, as being a next step. For them, though located in a non-monastic setting, being an Oblate offered a positive way of living as a meditator, based on a modification of practices and values derived from the monastic Rule. The Oblate way provided a context, principles and a daily pattern for living out the change in their life and person that was gradually occurring through their daily meditation discipline. They came to know that living by the Rule



in this way complements, supports and deepens their meditative practice. Specific Oblate activities such as reciting the Hours or Lectio Divina, often difficult to initially make sense of, gradually become meaningful through their actual practice. In particular the regular pattern of cataphatic (word) prayer in the Hours, complementing their meditation, grounds the day, creating a sense of the sacredness of their time in other activities. 'Lauds and Vespers anchor my awareness and value of time each day'. Over time participants developed a deepening sense of belonging to the Oblate community through this shared daily pattern of prayer.

Several noted that being able to develop one's own version of the Rule to address one's own life

circumstances both enables a degree of flexibility in developing a regular rhythm of daily prayer, and also promotes a focus on meaningful activities based on the principles and values derived from the Rule, addressing the distracting unfocussed societal media noise that trivializes our lives. The process of becoming an Oblate, through postulancy and novitiate, enabled participants to learn how to come to terms in a positive way with what specific topics in the Rule (such as obedience), understood as guiding principles and values, could mean for them in their own lives.

THE OBLATE MEDITATION COMMUNITY:

For all participants becoming an Oblate enables a deepening involvement in a form of Christian community based in meditative practice and a way of life derived from the Benedictine Rule. For each of the participants their weekly shared CM groups (whether in person or by zoom) formed an important supportive network for their own meditation practice. Community days and regional and national retreats linked them into a wider CM group, while providing input and support for their meditative practice. Despite their intermittent nature, specific Oblate activities (cell meetings, regional and national retreats) are supportive and sustaining of participants' shared life as a community of meditative Oblates, 'a spiritual network, like a spider's web'. The communality expressed in these groups, in which there is a degree of genuine sharing of spiritual life, all participants found very supportive. 'This is my community, my holy group'. One participant noted that Benedict produced a Rule for monastic life, but in fact provides principles and values that can support any human group in living as a community in their pattern of relationships.

Those who are relatively isolated from others by distance are especially appreciative of the limited opportunities to participate in CM or Oblate groups that are available to them. Most participants, having begun during Covid restrictions, continued to join in one, often several, zoom meetings each week. For most participants certain particular spiritual relationships, often initiated by other Oblates or deepened within the Oblate community (occasionally formalized as spiritual mentoring), have become very significant in their Christian life, a deep spiritual companionship, 'spiritual intimacy', not generally found elsewhere. There is a strong sense that 'we are not alone on the journey, we are doing it together'. However, a meditative Oblate's practice may also be supported by and support other specific relationships shared on

the spiritual path that are beyond the CM community (even, rarely, across different faith traditions).

THE INSTITUTIONAL CHURCH:

Participants' meditative Oblation was related to their involvement with an institutional church in various ways. For most, meditation practice with their local CM group and participation in the Oblate community addressed a deficit experienced in their traditional church involvement. For some, the meditative and Oblate communities effectively replace their institutional church, by being for them a Christian community in which they experience meaningful spiritually supportive relationships. For others their meditative practice itself has supported them in continuing their involvement with the institutional church which they still value, even though their focus is now on CM and the Oblate community rather than institutional church activities.

For several Oblates from a Roman Catholic background, despite a commitment to the Rule (which



itself assumes active membership of the Church) the institutional church and its sacraments have remained of marginal significance for them. For those from an Evangelical background with an Oblate commitment to the Rule, the institutional and sacramental context assumed in the Rule of Benedict is generally simply irrelevant, not meaningful in their reading of the Rule. However, for several, their meditative practice has deepened some aspects of their institutional church life, especially the experience of the sacramental Eucharist. For most participants, though involved to some extent with an institutional church, their CM commitment, in and through various groups and meetings, has become their most significant form of Christian community. 'Now we need the contemplative church'.

TRANSFORMATION AND ENGAGEMENT:

Participants shared in various ways that through living out one's meditative Oblation within the Oblate

community one develops a deeper engagement in service with all of the communities one is involved with (family, work, CM and Oblate communities, church and others). This gradually becomes a committed, yet detached and less egoic engagement in relationships in the various communities one participates in, based in a trusting confidence in gracious divine concern and care underlying all of our lives as human beings, as known through meditative practice. 'Meditation teaches you to recognize the ego at work.' Through a growing openness and responsiveness, as their meditative practice deepens over time, the quality of all of the relationships that make up their lives is slowly altered for a meditative Oblate. For example, participants affirmed they were able to better understand and accept all of their family members, whatever their different attitudes and behaviours, and seek to relate to them with care and concern. Responsive service within the various communities we are part of is the Oblate version of hospitality to visitors as to Christ in the Rule.

This change in their relationships reflects an inner transformation gradually produced by their meditation practice. 'You change within yourself with meditation.' All participants affirmed that their meditative practice discipline within their own Benedictine way gradually becomes a source enabling restoration and development in relationships within their various communities. 'All the things I do are my Oblate work.' Being an Oblate provides a supportive community enabling loving relationships in various communities where relationships are not inherently supportive, can be ambiguous or difficult. This is the deepest way in which 'meditation creates community', both within meditator groups and beyond into other groups.

While a deepening involvement with CM and the Oblate community may often displace some other involvements with certain secular communities, a commitment to the meditative Oblate path does not simply turn one inward, but rather deepens an inwardness that paradoxically makes one more available to the various communities beyond CM that one continues to be involved with. The principles and values within the Rule enabling the monk to live in a community (responsiveness to the Divine Word, a stable pattern of daily life, perseverance in fidelity to our vocation, hospitableness) are gradually internalized by an Oblate, influencing their relationships within the whole range of communities they are involved in. 'The Rule teaches you how to live in community, the Rule applies to all the communities we are in.'

SUMMARY

What was being sought from these conversations was the perspective of the meditative Oblate on their various relationships, because the Rule of Benedict presents living in relationships of love as being the monk's way to wholeness as human beings. For these meditative Oblates, in relating to the different communities that constitute their lives their relationships within CM and the Oblate community supported their meditative practice and Benedictine lifestyle. These meditative relationships were profoundly influential in their lives, gradually enabling a transformed engagement in their relationships in the various other communities they lived in. In seeking to outline the pattern of their relationships this small study sought to hear the voice of the meditative Oblate in order to help articulate lay Benedictine spirituality.

With thanks to all those meditating Oblates who participated in the conversations.

UK OBLATE COMMUNITY DAY 14TH AUGUST 2021,

by Valerie Quinlivan, Oblate from UK

This was the first Oblate Community Day I had attended and I had been looking forward to it; to meet people in the flesh and meditate and talk together; to be in St Marks again. It was a delight to meet the leaders of the day, Janet Robbins and Angela Gregson, after our many virtual encounters.

Most of the participants knew each other virtually and there was a good opportunity to deepen those contacts, initially with personal introductions, and then brief accounts of what had brought each of them to this point on the Oblate path. These (socially distanced!) encounters followed the meditation and led on to our relaxed picnic lunches.

Perhaps the highlight of the day was the reception of two Novices, who made their oblations to Janet, on behalf of the Community, in the presence of their mentors. Kathy Bradley thanked Angela Greenwood for her support, while Mark Kenny's oblation brought together the digital presence of Patricia Hay, via mobile video, with his own live presence. Thank God for the best of both worlds. For me, this live ceremony deepened and enriched my own reception as a novice via Zoom in July.

The Lectio that followed was also a delight. It was led by Mark Ball, who ensured we were all paired with different partners to share our inspirations and reactions to the two chosen passages. We heard the challenging verses from John 6:51-58 on the

Eucharist, as well as a short piece from the Prologue of the Rule. There was ample time to be alone with these readings, either walking in the garden or staying in the Meditatio space. I think we all found that final sharing enhanced our individual insights – which is the lovely value of Lectio.

We finished with Evening Prayer and Meditation, and, to quote our first reading of the morning from John Main “to allow God’s mysterious Presence within us to become not only a reality in our lives, but the reality which gives meaning, shape and purpose to everything we do, to everything we are.”

A really beautiful day.

THE EGO & SELF-TRANSCENDENCE, (Part 2) by Maria & Albert Zakharovy (Ukraine/ Russia NOC)

(This is the continuation of an article from the previous issue of Via Vitae)



...The first, basic level of our everyday life, where we face the need to apply discipline, is relationship. In relations of friendship, love, cooperation and creativity, we meet a new experience - the experience of meeting with the «other», the experience of knowing reality as «what really is». But our constraint of our ego and self-image does not allow us to enter this experience. A Japanese parable tells of an educated young student visiting an old Zen monk. He is familiar with the Zen tradition in theory, as with the art of direct perception of reality, and asks for more information about the practice. In response, the monk invited him to have some tea before the conversation. The monk began to pour hot tea into the guest’s mug, and continued pouring it when the mug was full. The guest shouted - «Stop pouring tea into the mug, it is already full, the tea is overflowing!» The monk replied to him - «Like this cup, your mind is full of frozen ideas and prejudices. How can I tell you something new about Zen if you don’t empty the cup of your mind?» In order to open up to new experience, we need to

have a free and empty space inside us, in which, as in the womb, a new form of ourselves can be born and mature. But maintaining this inner freedom is as difficult as maintaining order in the house. Over time, a mess always forms. Therefore, we need an effort of discipline, «labor of obedience».

This ancient and universal wisdom the Rule conveys to us in Chapter 7, teaching the art of ascending «to God» on the ladder, which is a symbolic image of the unity of body and soul. The rules for climbing this ladder are simple. When we are self-centered, egocentric, we fall down. When we are open to reality, to others, to the novelty of changes (requiring regular emptying), we instantly rise up to the Heavens of God, beyond the Ego: «We descend by self-exaltation and ascend by humility». This is the art of humility. It is simple, but not easy in practice, as Fr. Laurence says about meditation. In order to learn it, we need to constantly train hard and creatively develop our skills. Chapter 7 describes 12 steps in the practice of humility, in each of which we learn awareness and progress beyond our ego. But what we develop in meditation is the foundation by which we can practice each of the steps of humility. According to Cassian, we should repeat one prayer formula, without being distracted by the change of our internal states. This attentive repetition pulls out the very root of the distraction of our mind to «richness of thoughts.»

As one of our friends, a Carmelite monk, once said, «the path to God is an eternal movement in which we never stop, but the further we go, the deeper is our joy.» We can move if there is an empty space inside us, free from heavy property and phantoms of the past. And the paradox is that the path to Self (to our true self) is movement, which is usually perceived as movement «from our Self». Jesus teach us about this through the Scripture, Rule and meditation: «If anyone would be a follower of mine, he must leave self behind».

In the light of Meditation

What we practice in meditation is the foundation of the work of obedience. This work is deep attention, listening to the silence of Reality and to the Word that expresses this silence. The labor of obedience is as much a creative process as painting, poetry or music. Therefore, this work can be realized in many forms. The Rule (12 Steps of Humility) describes only the basic principles according to which we can practice obedience that brings us back to God. We must be creative in this, taking into account the features of our era and personal circumstances. But what happens in

our daily meditation is at the heart of every step, every form of obedience. It is a simple foundation on which to build a variety of more complex behaviors.

The spirituality of the Benedictine Rule is based on the fact that we make the journey of «eternal return», like the universal archetypal hero - from our own Ego to unity in God. In the text of the Rule, the authority of the word of the spiritual mentor, «the One who loves us and gives us useful advice» (RB, Prologue), plays a very important role - Christ himself, acting through the abbot, abbess or more experienced members of the community. But how can we follow the spirit of the Rule in situations where literally no one from the outside guides us, or in meditation - where we and all other members of the community are equal in the face of the simplicity of the practice? Here we should return to the mystical tradition, which says that Christ, as the Word of Divine silence, is our only teacher, and is present, teaching us, in every situation in a special way. That is why St. Augustine called Christ «Magister Internus» - the Inner Teacher. He is always with us - inside people, things and circumstances around us. He teaches us from within ourselves and the reality that surrounds us. In meditation, the Inner Master embodies himself in our discipline. By observing the simple conditions of meditation, we enter into oneness and unity with the Teacher - we practice the basis of obedience.

The practice of obedience that leads us from the Ego to God is hidden in the three main aspects of meditation - Silence, Stillness and Simplicity. These three axes of meditation are equivalent to the three Benedictine vows - Obedience, Stability and Conversion.

We begin with the fact that we enter into Silence and Obedience. The word Obedientia comes from lat. ob + audire, «listen». Benedict reminds us that the student should remain silent while listening to the Teacher. Leaving aside all our words and thoughts in meditation, we listen attentively to one word of discipline. Now we understand that Silence and Obedience are simply pure Attention.

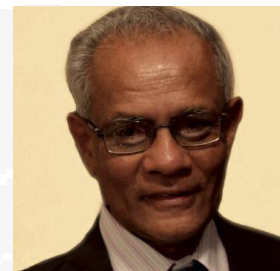
Then, Stillness and Stability. Perhaps meditation is the only oasis in our life where we could stop fussing and changing something all the time. Our body and our mind just staying in the present moment. We sit in one place, keep still and keep our back straight. We repeat our word, our mantra. Repetition purifies us and also leads to inner listening, with the help of which, during and after meditation, we will be open to the voice of God, which sounds «here and now».

By maintaining deep stillness of mind and body, we develop stability by «sitting at the feet» of God's presence, like Mary. This is our stable «fiat» - «yes» - to God.

And finally, Simplicity and Conversion. In meditation, we leave our Ego at the level of our self-understanding. Now we are as simple as children. Usually, it is with these nodes - verbal, bodily and mental activity - we complicate, shape and protect ourselves. While in the inner desert of meditation, we straighten these knots, making them straight paths for the Presence of God. When we meditate, we are simple and open to inner changes - to the work and life of God within us.

Did you notice that you were distracted? Returning again to the repetition of the word, we allow God to lead us beyond our Ego - «being transformed from glory to glory» (2 Cor. 3:18).

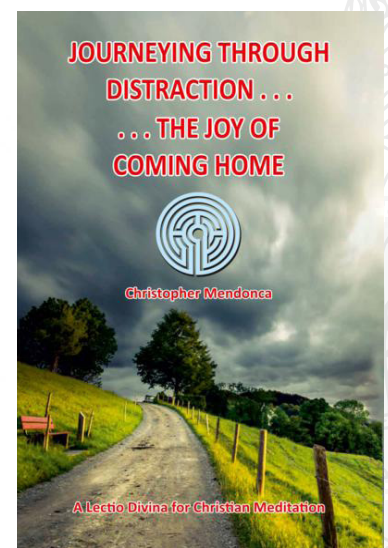
BOOK REVIEWS



Review of 'JOURNEYING THROUGH DISTRACTION... THE JOY OF COMING HOME - A Lectio Divina for Christian Meditation',

by Christopher Mendonca, Oblate from India,
by Stefan Reynolds

I have kept in touch with Christopher since I visited his home in Mumbai some twenty years ago, and his family were so hospitable to me. Christopher had recently come to meditation in 2000 when Fr Laurence visited Mumbai. Over the years I have been reading the series of reflections he writes for the Spirituality column of The Times of India, India's leading newspaper, and The Examiner, the Catholic Newsweekly for Mumbai. Christopher is trained in theology and psychology. He has put together these reflections and new



ones in this wonderful book with a Forward by Fr Laurence. In *Journeying through Distraction... The Joy of Coming Home* Christopher leads us through the Bible from the creation of the world to the New Testament giving us poetic meditations on key moments and figures.

There are sixty Chapters, each in poetic form – no dry theology here! Each Chapter starts with a quotation from Laurence Freeman, John Main or Kim Nataraja (and once with Thomas Merton) and meditates on a section of Scripture. The Chapters are either Reflections or Soliloquies, the former are poetic Lectio Divina on the Biblical story, the latter are written from within the minds of the main Biblical characters represented. Christopher's 'Reflections' show his deep theological and contemplative insight, his 'Soliloquies' show his psychological wisdom – working as a counsellor, he has a keen understanding of what the many characters in the Bible went through on their journey.

By starting each Chapter with a quote from one of our meditation teachers he helps unpack the Biblical and liturgical roots of Christian Meditation. He also gives an excellent example of Lectio Divina, the whole book is a meditation on God's Word. He opens the book by asking "How is it possible to 'listen' to something that is 'written'?" In fact, by searching the question marks in the book, I find there are 99 questions. As Fr Laurence sometimes says, a good teacher is known by his ability to ask questions. Christopher never takes Scripture simply at face value but is always exploring the deeper contemplative and psychological treasures that make it a way of 'listening' to God. We listen to God in nature; God speaks and Creation comes into Being. We listen to God in the wisdom of the past; God speaks to us through the Patriarchs and the Prophets. God speaks to us in our journey of meditation; the way through the desert is illustrated in the story of Exodus, the struggle with distraction toward the promised land. God speaks to us in the call to 'come home'. *Coming Home* starts with Part Two of Christopher's book where God starts to speak to us in the flesh. Jesus shows that humanity and God are no longer separate.

In Part Two of the book Christopher offers us "a cloud of witnesses" from the New Testament, whose lives were transformed by the encounter with Jesus. fellow Oblate Greg Ryan comments on the back cover of the book that here "we listen with the ear of the heart to rediscover St Paul's 'secret' that "we possess the mind of Christ." Laurence Freeman writes in the Forward: "In this deeply refreshing and spiritually

alive book Christopher explores the living Word of familiar scripture passages with a freshness, clarity and sense of wonder arising from a mature contemplative approach formed by his daily practice of meditation. This is why this book brings the texts alive again."

I recommend this book to all meditators wishing to deepen their practice of Lectio Divina and their understanding of Scripture. It is available through WCCM Media store. An interview with Christopher is available on the WCCM website <https://wccm.org/news/journeying-through-distraction-the-joy-of-coming-home/>



**Review of
HOLD THE ROPE, CARRY YOUR CROSS:
CHRISTIANITY AND THE TEN BULL
PICTURES OF ZEN,**

**by Andrew McAlister and Carlos Siqueira,
Oblates from Australia and Brazil,
by Stefan Reynolds**

Oblates may be familiar with the Bull pictures of Zen, through Sr Eileen O'Hea's wonderful Essay on 'The Spiritual Journey' used in the Essential Teaching Weekend (and Handbook) or their depiction in William Johnston, *Silent Music: The Science of Meditation* (1974). This current book by two Oblates, and published in 2021, really gives a full Christian Meditation commentary by Andrew and our own pictures, drawn by Carlos. It is the collaboration



of two Oblates and a wonderful example of the networking the Oblate community makes possible.

The Forward to the book is by Fr Laurence. Andrew gives a fascinating Introduction section, where he looks at how Christianity and Zen find common ground in the practice of meditation. He explains how Zen, though it has its roots in Buddhism, is not a religion but a practice. As such it is transferable across religious traditions. He also shows that Contemplative prayer and Christian Meditation, though they also have roots in Christian faith, are fundamentally a way of being, a way of living, and not tied to one system of beliefs. So Contemplative Christianity and Zen have much in common. Andrew gives a good survey of the literature on the subject but most of all he leads us into a contemplative way of approaching the Ten Bull Pictures that are a key meditation for Zen.

We then come to the wonderful drawings by Carlos, which with simple clarity bring to light the deep meanings of the Ten Pictures. With each picture Andrew gives a meditation, guiding us through questions and hints into the process of transformation that is depicted in the Pictures. We get to know the searcher – who is us. Who am I? What am I looking for? We get to know the Bull – mysterious and elusive but also strong, down to earth and fierce – our passion for enlightenment. We get to know the rope – our practice that yoke's us to what we seek. And the gradual integration of the searcher and the bull – catching it, taming it, riding it home, and then letting go so that both the bull and the searcher are transcended. In this way we reach the source. As Andrew writes; "The Spirit involves us, all forgotten, in the love-life of Christ and his source, Abba, and this love that flows is the Holy Spirit." This is the level of the deepest mysticism, the unity of all things, of the self and God. But the Zen Pictures bring us back into the world, into the marketplace, where the Divine energy flows out to become love in the world. At the end of the book Andrew gives a very helpful 'Glossary of Terms'. His comments on Carlos' pictures are brief and meditative, keeping us always focused on the pictures and on our response to them, encouraging us to sit and meditate on them. The 'Glossary' helps explain and unpack some of the hints and prompts he offers.

This is a very attractive book, a perfect gift for someone, written and drawn by two Oblates from WCCM. I highly recommend it. Available through Medio Media or Amazon, it is a short book – no heavy tome – but deep and a joy to read. It is something you can easily share with friends and family – an easy to read present that carries no religious baggage but points to Zen and Contemplative Christianity. The pictures are beautiful. As Father Laurence writes in

the Forward, "The deep simplicity of the Bull Pictures engaged the mind and imagination of two Christian meditators and has produced this rich and intriguing book." A wonderful fruit of our Oblate community. A fruit to share with many! If you want to get a glimpse there is an interview with Andrew and with Carlos on the WCCM webpage <https://wccm.org/news/hold-the-rope-carry-your-cross-christianity-and-the-ten-bull-pictures-of-zen/> or the Ebook link for purchasing (Amazon, Booktopia, etc): <http://www.vividpublishing.com.au/holdtherope/>

Reflections and Poems

Reflection on being part of the Oblate Community from a novice oblate living in relative solitude in the Catlins, on the South-East Coast of New Zealand,
by Yvonne Smith



Greetings everyone. As I write that greeting, I think of Paul writing his epistles which eventually became many of the books in the New Testament. I think of him sitting at his desk during the time he was in Ephesus taking 'time out' from his traveling mission to the early Christians. I am always comforted by the thought that not only did he work very hard moving around the communities of the early church, but he also spent significant periods of time in stillness and solitude. He spent time being a lighthouse, to use Annie Lamott's metaphor from Bird by Bird.

*"Lighthouses don't go running all over an island
looking for boats to save;
they just stand there shining."*

A significant aspect of the view from my deck is the

Nugget Point lighthouse, on the lower south-east coast of New Zealand at the northern end of the Catlins. With a latitude of 46.3plus degrees south it is almost 'next stop, Antarctica'. It is a wild and windswept coastline of bush, farms and beaches. Birdlife wails



and calls. Sea lions haul themselves onshore to rest on a regular basis. In winter the tuis line up on the rail of my deck insisting on being fed their ration of sugar water. They are very bossy birds. They are sometimes called the Parson bird because of the white tuft at their neck.

I am a 'retired parson' of the Presbyterian persuasion. In my retirement. If I so choose, I can sit on my deck or in my tiny fifty square meter apartment and spend all day watching the Nuggets Lighthouse in the distance. When the day is sunny and clear its white upright sentinel like structure seems very close. When the skies are hazy and the winter light dull, the green hills turn blue, and the lighthouse recedes into the distance. Sometimes of an evening the setting sun dances along the hills bringing out the green again and the lighthouse takes center stage, gleaming white, awaiting its cue. Dusk falls and out flashes the light, beaming at alternating five and two second intervals until dawn is sufficiently established for safety from the 'Nuggets' – little points of rock rising out of the sea from a bedrock deep below the surface of the ocean. I often ruminate on what living from a 'lighthouse stance' might look like. I wonder if it might look like an oblate who is a meditator.

As I type I note it is the two year anniversary of my moving to live here by the sea, beach and bush that are my front and back yard. The decision to retire to my childhood beach haven of a village was an intentional decision to embrace a call to solitude and silence. It was time to stop 'performing' and 'doing'. Time instead to practice 'being'. In many ways, the past two years have been a roller coaster of adjustment. Most of my adult life has been lived in cities with a family and fulfilling, demanding work. However I grew up on a farm and my first parish ministry was a rural parish so I knew what rural life entailed. But nothing quite prepares one for such change. To leave status and role, to leave the empty nest, to leave the convenience of

food and coffee on tap, to leave like-minded friends in order to live in relative solitude is challenging. There was much 'letting go' as I embraced the ocean's ebb and flow. There was patience to cultivate in order to allow room for what my life here to unfold. The gift undergirding 'the ride' has been a steadily growing bedrock of stability. I have come home. Not only to a place but to myself. That has been in no small way a function of the beauty and grounding that comes to me from living in this particular place. The bedrock of that grounding is the discipline of meditation and Benedictine practice in my daily life. I am, however, under no illusion that this growing bedrock of stability is very much dependent on the threads of friendship, common commitment and wisdom woven together by the community of Oblates in person and online, for example regular email contact with my mentor, zoom meditation sessions, as well as the novice forum that zooms together once a month.

It is a seven-hour car journey to my nearest Oblate cell so I only manage to physically join the group once or twice a year. Most recently I was with them as three new postulants were welcomed into the group. It was a very special gathering of seasoned, mid-lifer's and newbies in the Benedictine Way. So much life experience, wisdom and open hearts gathered together in the ambience of a community of very different individuals who seek to follow the Christ in this particular Benedictine conversation. I was so fortunate to have been able to join them and very aware of how important it is for me every now and again, to make that journey.

This recognition of the significance of the Oblate community in my solitude was reinforced for me when I joined with oblates around the world for the 24hour meditation and then the online International Oblate Conference. My solitude is chosen. Many of you worldwide have experienced solitude during this pandemic which has not been chosen. Yet no matter the circumstances, we are joined together in a unity of spirit and purpose.

I want to say thank you to the community both here in New Zealand and globally. To those I interact with online, email and in person as well as those whom I only know of by name or those who are complete strangers. All of whom are praying the Hours in some form, reading the Rule, and walking the Way. Without that 'cloud of witnesses' my solitude would simply be loneliness instead of a commitment to stability and a conversion to aloneness in the Benedictine spirit.

I am only just beginning to get a glimpse of what my living as an oblate looks like. I am beginning to

‘get the hang of’ taking a lighthouse stance. I am still struggling to keep the balance between solitude and community. Metaphorically, when I look out at the Nuggets Lighthouse and see the rocks around it I think of how the oblate community, like the bedrock below the ocean, provides the foundation for a meditative lighthouse stance. Thank you for being there and for the light of Christ that keeps watch through the Oblate community both in New Zealand and world-wide.

A reflection on Philippians 2.1-15, in the light of Bonnevaux International Oblate Retreat 9th- 11th July 2021,
by Mark Ball, UK Oblate

Philippians 2.1-15 : “So if in Christ there is anything that will move you, any incentive in love, any fellowship in the Spirit, any warmth or sympathy - I appeal to you, make my joy complete by being of a single mind, one in love, one in heart and one in mind.”

Nothing is to be done out of jealousy or vanity; instead, out of humility of mind, everyone should give preference to others, everyone pursuing not selfish interests but those of others.

Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being, was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross. And for this God raised him high, and gave him the name which is above all other names; so that all beings in the heavens, on earth and in the underworld, should bend the knee at the name of Jesus, and that every tongue should acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

So my dear friends, you have always been obedient; your obedience must not be limited to times when I am present. Now that I am absent it must be more in evidence, so work out your salvation in fear and trembling. It is God who, for God’s own generous purpose, gives you the intention and the powers to act. Let your behaviour be free of murmuring and complaining so that you remain faultless and pure, unspoilt children of God surrounded by a deceitful and underhand brood, shining out among them like bright stars in the world.

A translation of the poem *Hermidad*, by the Mexican Octavio Paz, a homage to the astronomer Ptolemy:

I’m human: I am fleeting

and unending this vast night.
But my eyes gaze skyward:
where stars inscribe.

Unknowingly I understand:
I am manuscript as well,
and right now (this very moment)
someone spells *me* out.

I don’t know when I last tried writing anything neatly out by hand. Writing out my chart felt a bit like writing lines at school! Apparently, experts can tell a lot about us from our handwriting. They’d have a field day with mine!

Though we can’t analyse his handwriting, we can tell a lot about the apostolic tentmaker from these precious words handed down from Philippian predecessors to our international Zoomunity today.

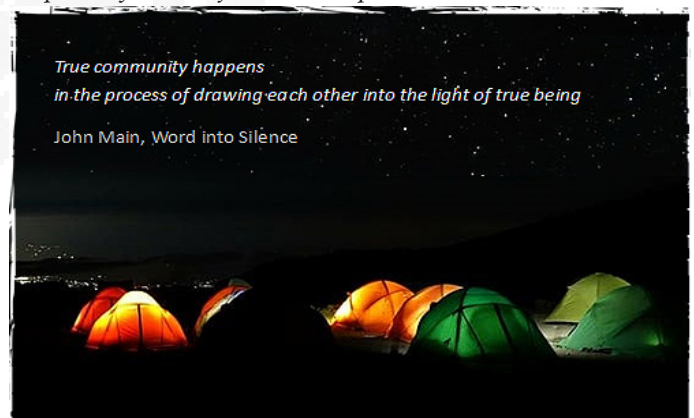
I don’t know if Paul tried putting up tents, or just stuck to the undoubtedly easier task of making them. But we do know Paul tried an evidently even harder job: to help unruly Christians - disobedient, unstable, stubborn - put up with each other, pitch in together, write good news in God’s good world, like stars write light at night.

Like this monastery of ours, a tent has no fixed walls, nothing dug-in, entrenched, no ivory towers, no parapets. Tents simply shape a thinly-veiled, empty cloister-space - a permeable impermanence, a dwelling place sufficient for the journey’s here and now, sufficient to be filled with light.

What we perceive to be a star is travelling light. A star’s a distant balanced ball of burning gas, zooming muted through time, through space - it’s lifetime closer to eternity than ours, but burning born and burning dying too.

But when we mortals flame with Spirit-kindled fire of love, heaven’s here, unclung to, incandescent now in Christlike human hands, in Christlike hearts and minds.

photo of Kilimanjaro Basecamp



*True community happens
in the process of drawing each other into the light of true being*
John Main, *Word into Silence*

And here and now - and travelling light - together we have set up camp - set hearts and minds upon this poor, sacramental ground, well trod, well lit, by those who've gone before. Drawn to one another's shining bright, we're drawn together to the light who pitches up among us.

And the one who wrote the stars across the inky sky, if we prefer - listening, unmonologued - to bend the knee, the will, writes new starlight now of us.

Reflection on Thomas Merton's Hagia Sophia (from Book of Hours), by Marleen de Pelsmaecker, Oblate from Holland

"The helpless one, abandoned to sweet sleep, him the gentle one will awake: Sophia.

All that is sweet in her tenderness will speak to him on all sides in everything, without ceasing, and he will never be the same again. He will have awakened not to conquest and dark pleasure but to the impeccable pure simplicity of One consciousness in all and through all: one Wisdom, one Child, one Meaning, one Sister.

The stars rejoice in their setting, and in the rising of the Sun. The heavenly lights rejoice in the going forth of one man to make a new world in the morning, because he has come out of the confused primordial dark night into consciousness. He has expressed the clear silence of Sophia in his own heart. He has become eternal."

This part of Thomas Merton's poem Hagia Sophia came into my heart as a grace. These words describe so beautifully what happens when we go on the path of daily meditation, opening to 'the clear silence of Sophia in our own heart'. I recognize myself in this poem, being gently awakened through meditation, becoming aware of the power in ourselves and understanding that we are all one, all part of the One.

It's a constant feeling of joy and as Thomas Merton says: we will never be the same again.

**Poems, by Tomasz Zontek
Łubianka, Polish Oblate**

who made his Final Oblation at the July 2021 online retreat.

The Smell of Flowers

I told her
with fear and sadness
that love is gone
she smiled
tenderly took
my hand
we sat down to meditate
she pointed her finger
beyond the mind
at the heart of the One
who is awareness
she said

you are not a thought
the love that has left
is here
keeps coming here
like the smell of a flower
wanting nothing
except self-sacrifice.

One Heart

look my friends
one heart
is in us and
we are in it
in its light
everything becomes simple
simple like bread
the bread
we share
understanding and acceptance
love and compassion
the Lord breaks bread
and crushes heart
with fingers of silence
gathers scraps of light
so that nothing is lost
the Lord called
and the beggar heard him
heard for the first time
the word
written in the heart
simple like
bread

**Reflection and Poem,
by Anne-Marie Doecke,
Oblate from Queensland, Australia**

St Benedict advised his monks to remind themselves day by day that they were going to die. Most of us can easily pray in the Lord's prayer, "Thy kingdom come" but according to Richard Rohr, Franciscan priest, it means nothing unless we can also pray, 'My kingdom go'. A contemplative practice helps us to pray both. Part of us knows that as long as we live, we will be living in the in-between, in the liminal space between what we are awakening to and what we are hoping for, a reign of mercy, humility and graciousness where all voices are heard and all needs are met.

In solitude and community, in silence, we learn to sit in a space of helplessness and hopefulness. We are choosing the middle way, neither standing nor lying down. As we breathe in, we are receptive to the gift of our own being and in every exhalation, learning that our life is not about ourselves. We are becoming aware that everything is pivoted around the still point. T.S. Eliot wrote, 'Except for the point, the still point, There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.'

Recently I felt this joy when I witnessed the incredible beauty of a pelican. Creativity was drawn out of me and I sat down to write this poem.

The stately pelican
Waits for nightfall
Unaware of the beauty
Of its reflection
Perfect symmetry
Under the water
Gliding without sound
Amidst chattering flocks
Of water birds
On the banks
Securing their place
Before dark

In the fading light
Of our demise
May we also
Unselfconsciously
Gift those passing by
Those busy with dread
Fearful repression
With a glimpse
Of a depth of spirit
Inherent dignity
Able to surrender
With tranquil ease

Truly, in our end is our beginning. This is the eternal paradox. To be still is to enable us, 'to run while we have the light of life,' as Benedict advised his monks in the sixth century. In that moment of stillness, I felt called to witness to what I had seen. God was calling me to life.

Poem in Covid year,
by Madelaine Mageau, Oblate since 1985,
Ontario, Canada

Space...sweet spaciousness

Tell me, please, what is it, is it this cave
its soft flame burning faithful
Is it an infinite horizon of dreams
monarch butterflies flying free
Maybe it's hunger voracious
to know? to be known?
and plumb depths unimagined
Could it be looking into star-swept velvet sky
rush of knowing moment clairvoyant
"Ah, we are so much more than we can ever
imagine!"
Then perhaps it's movement arrested
words withheld
into sighs of sweet surrender:
Acquiesce
into Love's eternal flowing

This Little Moment

This small space
a moment
a gentle pause
rest between musical phrases

Time
to let go the held in breath
the striving
and doing and wanting
What of
a greeting
of moment
without a goal
And in this
is Beloved
always
(O sweet repose)

Poem,
by Sile Terry, Oblate in Ireland

Lockdown

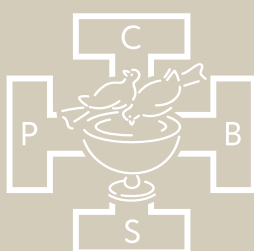
Lockdown, frequent for sure,
Yet, an opportunity to take stock, be creative, review!
Life has become simpler, no clutter, no fuss, few deadlines,
lots of precious time to 'be,' with ease.
Trá an Phéarla, natural beauty for sure!
The sea, stormy white or sun lit turquoise, always new!
Welcome sounds of birds chirping, dogs barking, dippers
dipping,
Refreshing sea smells of seaweed & wild flowers.
Taste of sea water and comforting ginger tea.
Touch of a gale or a gentle warm breeze.
Best of all, more precious than our energising swim,
the chat, laughs, tears, poem sharing, the coming together,
your presence, your valued company!
So what have I learned?
It's not about always being busy!
having lots of choices, 'things'!
Not even about constant good weather, or enjoying
'Perfect health,' No such things !!!
The way maybe positively challenging!
Daily Silence & Stillness hold the key, to staying
present, to our uniqueness and differences.
So, stay close to nature and who/what nourishes you?
remain open and grateful to all friends.
Slow down, listen, love, cry, chat, enjoy the 'craic', risk
being creative, dance, sing, swim,
Trust, keep life simple, do your best and 'Be'.

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