

## **Benedictine Oblates of the World Community**

*The Spirit who is mind and heart and vast spaces, enfolds the whole universe, and in silence – is loving to All.  
This the Spirit in my heart.*

For Benedictine oblates, indeed the meditating community, this upanishad carries deep meaning. Deeply rooted in the origins of monasticism, the essential commitment of Oblature is the commitment of sharing the tradition of silence and prayer.

‘A tonsure and a habit does not a monk make. We all have a monastic dimension to our lives.’ Dom Main often said. The solitude, engendered by the silence we practice, is not a self-indulgent privacy, but a Bodhisattva-like presence in our world.

The year following the founding of the Benedictine Priory of Montreal in 1977, Dom John Main accepted the promises of the first Oblates to his monastic community. In 1991, under the direction of Dom Laurence Freeman, the World Community of Christian Meditators (WCCM), was called into being in New Harmony, Indiana. The Oblate Community has grown, expanding far beyond the monastery established by John Main in Montreal.

As Oblates, we remain the monastic heart of the World Community of Christian Meditators, and promise, as do monks and nuns (‘nunks’ as coined by Dom Jean Leclercq, who often visited the Montreal Priory) who vow to be faithful to the three precepts of Benedict’s Rule.

OBEDIENCE – The capacity to listen and discern with the heart.

STABILITY – which for us Oblates, as for all meditators, is the fidelity to our twice-daily meditation, and

CONVERSIO – which calls forth from within us a fearlessness to follow our conscience, with ego left behind – a deep honesty with oneself – a reckless integrity, that defies religiosity.

Father John said that the greatest sin is to hand out, what he called, ‘receipts for deceit’, misleading others in spiritual matters, however trivial they seem.

I am reminded of a saying of my favourite Sufi Poet of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Yunus Emre, who said:

‘There is no truth in you if you are not honest. Everybody is honest if you are honest’.

This is the childlike simplicity, yet uncompromising quality of the oblate path. The essential spirit of the Rule of Saint Benedict is not static, but is the SPIRIT OF LIFE, and the VISION is one of UNITY. Its specific quality is that of a FULLY HUMAN LIFE. The whole person – body and soul – making the pilgrimage. It takes maturity. It takes purity of intention.

One does not recruit oblates – it is never about numbers – aspirants are kept waiting --- to test their resolve.... Once admitted, the candidate embarks under the guidance of a mentor chosen

by the National Coordinator, on a six-months Postulancy, followed by a year of Noviciate, after which the Novice applies to the Director of the Community for full Oblature. It might take longer, but time is of no great matter. The journey itself is the goal.

Dom Main advised not to write monographs on prayer, but to develop as women and men committed to a life of prayer in the fullness of the Benedictine Tradition. When truly lived, monastic life, that of a Benedictine Oblate, cannot but communicate its inner experience to all around it, and to lead all who come in contact to participate in its mystery. The condition of the whole-hearted openness to Love is the condition you and I and every human being is called to!

‘Everything proceeds from Love’, Father John said from his own experience, ‘is held together by Love and returns with the realized gift of personal consciousness to Love’.

This is our Oblate vision of life. It is a vision of Unity. It sees that all creation is drawn into a cosmic movement towards Oneness. Our commitment is to communicate this vision to our contemporaries – by living it.

Our main task, as individuals, and as a community, is to return and keep returning to our silent centre. This is the journey of our life – which begins in Faith and ends in Union - a Union within which one is one with one’s own Spirit. We come to realise in the profound silence, that the same Spirit enfolds the whole universe and is loving to all.

Apollonia (Polly) Schofield  
Canadian Oblate Coordinator  
Ottawa, June 2022

There are about 120 members of the Canadian Oblate Community dispersed across this vast country, meeting in cells, online or in person, meditating together.

Canadians participate in the Community at the International level, such as *Benedict’s Well*, meeting at Bonnevaux online or in person etc. The International newsletter - *Via Vitae* – with contributions from people around the world, distributed by mail and electronically. Our annual Oblate Retreat is held at the Cistercian Monastery in Rougemont, Quebec.

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