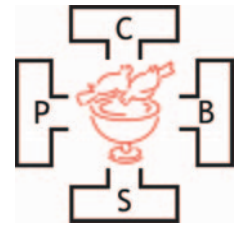


Via

WAY OF LIFE

Vitae



Benedictine Oblates of
The World Community for Christian Meditation



THE EASTER TREE

Bonnevaux: Centre for Peace, France.

(Photo by Laurence Freeman)



From Laurence Freeman OSB

WCCM Director, Prior of Bonnevaux

Food and Drink and the Resurrection

In Chapters 39 and 40 of the Rule Benedict defines his attitude to food and drink. He is highly practical and people often smile at his detailed instructions. Yet his comments embody the Rule's ever-present principle of moderation in the middle way of the common life of the monastery.

He prescribes two cooked dishes for the main meal thus respecting the important element of choice in food and enjoying your meal. He was Italian of course. What he would think of the modern preoccupation with allergies and special diets is an open question. Fruit and vegetables are recommended but if they are not available people shouldn't grumble. In other words, there is allowance for personal differences but not rampant individualism or obsessiveness. He allows a generous daily portion of bread. He is not a strict vegetarian, restricting the meat of four-footed creatures only for the sick. Otherwise, fish and chicken are the norm. Perhaps these rules reflect both general beliefs about food held at the time and economic factors. Reiterating the presiding principle of his view of life, he adds that nothing more contradicts the Christian way than excess. The 36th Tool of Good Works in Chapter 4 is 'non multum edax' which means a monk should not be a 'voracious eater'. Nor should they over-indulge in wine or sleep – these two excesses being obviously connected.

Regarding wine he recognises the difficulty of enforcing total abstinence though this seems to be his preference. Again, he prescribes moderation, at a *hemina* a day. This is thought to be between a quarter and a half of a litre. Perhaps the wine of his day was not as strong as we are used to. Compared with more worldly ideas, this allowance is not a right which the monk can insist on. If the wine is not available for any reason the monk should not grumble.

In describing how meals should be served and shared it is clear that eating together is, like praying together, a kind of liturgy. In the ancient world 'commensality', sharing food or breaking bread together was seen as a sign of peace, trust and fellowship. For St Benedict, the Christian definition of this universal principle meant that the brethren would serve each other at meals. Rather than making it a free for all, however, and always preferring order to confusion, he describes how the servers should be pre-assigned on a weekly basis. Typically, he makes an exception to this rule for those who have conflicting obligations of service. As elsewhere, over and above all rules and prescriptions, he insists in this section of the Rule that charity should always override legalism.

Recently, I was thinking of Benedict's ideas about food as I read the Resurrection appearances in the gospel. They insist on the physicality of the Risen body of the Lord. In John 20, doubting Thomas is invited to put his hand right into the wound in Jesus' side. In Luke 24 we are shown Jesus eating a fish with the disciples to show they are not seeing a Ghost.

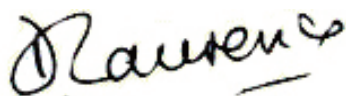
This insistence on the physical reality of the Risen body can be confusing or embarrassing, especially to modern westerners, conditioned by a literal materialism. Is it going too far? For example, if he ate and drank with his disciples after the Resurrection, didn't he also have to excrete it later like all human beings?

St Augustine and others said 'no'. The 'glorified body' of the Resurrection according to Aquinas converted the food into 'pre-existing matter'. This apparently tricky question can illuminate the mystery of the Resurrection in terms of the transformation of matter. Teilhard de Chardin once described spirit as 'matter incandescent'. Modern physics, too, recognises a 'spirituality of matter' when it affirms that energy can take different forms but cannot be destroyed.

St Paul speaks to this in 1 Corinthians as he tries to explain the Resurrection to the sceptical Greeks who found it irrational. He speaks of the physical body as like a seed that dies and produces a new bodily form in the plant. Using the cosmology of his time he describes the hierarchy of physicalities in ways similar to yogic or vedic ideas. The 'body' manifests in a 'gross' physical form subject to the laws of time and space. (Jesus could be tired, hungry and thirsty). But it also embodies in a 'subtle' form allowing it freedom from these laws while acting in time and space. (You can't lock Jesus out of the room where you are huddled in fear). The final form is the 'spiritual' body, the glorified Christ after the Ascension which allows him to be universally present, everywhere, here and now. ('I am with you always until the end of time').

Benedict is very down to earth about food and drink and serving at meals. But his vision of this important part of daily life is suffused with a spiritual insight into the material and ordinary things. He urges monks and oblates to live through them in a very different way from a fast-food outlet, a cafeteria or even a posh restaurant. If we follow his wisdom in these mundane things we will see the luminosity of Christ shine through them.

With love,




From Marie Louise Schmidt
International Oblate Co-Ordinator

Dear brothers and sisters,

"May those who pray here be strengthened by the Holy Spirit to serve all who come and to receive them as Christ, Himself." This is what we pray for in the WCCM closing prayer after meditation. It echoes Chapter 53 in the Rule of Benedict on the reception of guests: "All guests who arrive should be received as if they were Christ."



The WCCM theme of this year is "The future of religion."



Fr. Laurence with some new Chinese oblates at the recent March Malaysian retreat.

Maybe we, as oblates could ask ourselves: How do I meet people from other belief systems and receive them as Christ himself? Do I have room for those whose otherness of thought and culture disturbs or provokes me?

Following the Rule of Benedict, we learn to become holy by being fully human, serving each other through the simplest daily tasks. This is needed – we are living in very turbulent times – and I am happy to say that our Community of

oblates is growing. This year during the Malaysian retreat 15 – 18th of March, no less than 14 novices from China received their full oblation. And we have 5 novices from New Zealand receiving their full oblation too at their national retreat in March. This for me is a great sign of hope for the future – and the future of religion and humanity.

20-25 October we have our yearly International Oblate Retreat at Bonnevaux and like last year it will be possible to take part online for some of the sessions. In some countries participants listen to the talks online together – following the retreat programme as best they can locally. Hope to see you there on the ground or online.

Wishing you all a Happy Easter full of new beginnings
"Christ is risen! ... He is risen indeed!"

Marie Louise Schmidt
International Oblate Coordinator



EDITORIAL

Andrew McAlister, Editor, Via Vitae

Dear friends,

I am writing this in the sixth week of the Easter season. Why do various Christian denominations have this extended Easter season? Perhaps it's to help us see that Easter is every day and every moment. This divinising Easter journey that we are all on winds its way through the ordinary of our lives, leading us on and into the Resurrection of Jesus, a resurrection we all share.

We know as oblates following Benedict's Rule that this journey of conversion is ordinary and extraordinary; it is in the moment-by-moment reality of our humanity interacting with the grace of the God life, embodied in all of Creation. We know this grace as love – love involved, personal, intimate, and transcending any limitation we can think of and act out.

Fr. Laurence's reflection on Chapter's 39 and 40 of the Rule helps us to see that the Resurrection is as ordinary and as vital as food and drink. It is easy to forget this vitality as we live our everyday routines. Our meditation practice transforms this tendency to forget as we, day after day, attend into the silent vitality at the heart of us, indeed all Creation.

Over time, our forgetting transforms into simple consciousness, living now and loving. This living consciousness is what it is to pray without ceasing. The God-life, saturating all consciousness, awaits our full and vital realisation as risen.

Jesus shows us our destiny. The risen body of Jesus in the gospel stories is the culmination of the contemplative revolution that Jesus began – a risen body that cannot be without the humanity that proceeds it. This human journey is the concern of religion, its authentic present and future. Thank you Marie Louise for drawing our attention to the WCCM theme of this year: The Future of Religion.

Nick Polaschek reminds us, in his reflection on stability, that this revolution rises from the ground of the everyday. Our "growth comes from our commitment to a chosen regular spiritual regime." Our regime is the Christianity that the Benedictine uniquely lives and breathes, one that includes meditation very naturally. Thanks, Nick.

Thank you to Sandy Andrews for sharing with us something of your journey to full oblation. Once again, we hear the emphasis that this revolution of religion is lived in the ordinary "with extraordinary awareness and commitment" – extraordinary in its gentleness and perseverance.

Darrell Taylor, and Beate and Derek Steller turn our attention to Bonnevaux: its retreats (Darrell) and its volunteers (Beate and Derek). Yet again, this steady drumbeat of revolutionary and ordinary conversion is heard. Thanks to all of you for highlighting the gift that Bonnevaux is, a gift that depends on all of us.

Your reading will then bring you to Noel Keating's wonderful reflection on John F. Deane's poem 'The Unheard Music'. Those of us who attended the John Main Seminar last year will know that John F. Deane gave us a great conference on the theme 'Celtic Monastic Poetry, Entanglement and the Cosmic Christ.' Noel draws us deeply into the poem, it being an effective "allegorical map" for meditation into contemplation and out again. For the contemplative, allegorical maps are the best kind – this one taking the ordinary form of rowing.

Our newsletter then concludes with poetry from Darrell Taylor (Canada) Anne-Marie Doecke (Australia) Tomasz Zontek-Łubianka (Poland) Vernon Chandler (Germany). Thank you all for sharing something of your journey of conversion with us.

You may notice that there are no book reviews in this edition. None appear because none were submitted. If you have recently read a book that all of us may benefit from, please consider writing a review for our next 2026 Via Vitae. Might I suggest Thomas Litzler's new book, '[Meditating With The Earth](#)'? It's available on the Medio Media website at bit.ly/4ujKiBo.

We are planning something special for the next edition (due Advent 2026): a Via Vitae commemorating the centenary of John Main's birth. There is currently a collecting of firsthand accounts of knowing Fr. John underway. If you can, or you know of anyone, who can add to this collecting, please let me know. More details about the next edition, along with a further invitation to contribute, will be sent out later in the year.

I would like to thank Albert and Maria Zakharov for their exceptional formatting of Via Vitae, over many editions. They have now stepped back from their role. Thank you to Anne Dillon for formatting this edition of the Newsletter.

Finally, another Celtic contribution sent to us by Eilish Tennent (one of our earliest oblates): St. Patrick's Breastplate. May Christ be in the heart of all who think of Eilish.

St. Patrick's Breastplate

*Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ within me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,*

*Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of everyone
who thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone
who speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.*

With Love,
Andrew



Sunrise in Australia. Photo by Laurence Freeman

Meditation teaches us this too: the deeper we enter into this mystery of unity, the more truly human we become in every sense of the word. It is a commitment to the whole of Creation.

John Main, *Word Made Flesh*. (From Thomas Litzler's book *Meditating With The Earth*)

REFLECTIONS | NEWS | POEMS

Meditation makes each of us a channel for the divine energies to enter the human and natural worlds and to bathe them in the love that simultaneously creates and redeems.

Laurence Freeman, *Meditatio Newsletter*, 2011



Bonnevaux, France. Photo by Laurence Freeman

Reflections

On Benedictine Stability

Nick Polaschek – New Zealand Oblate

In chapter 58 of the Rule of St Benedict, the person committing to become a monastic promises stability, which means they “are no longer free to leave the monastery.”

In chapter 66, the monastery is to be designed so there will be no need for the monastic to leave the monastery, “to roam outside because this is not at all good for their souls”

In chapter 67, a monastic who is sent outside the monastery on a journey by the Abbot on monastic business is to do public penance on their return “in case they may have been caught off guard on the way by seeing some evil thing or hearing some idle talk.”

The Rule sets out at length the stable daily pattern of life of the monastic within the enclosure of the monastery.

While for many Benedictine monastics today their promise of stability no longer has any meaning in terms of living in one place as mandated in the Rule, some monastic groups, notably Cistercians, still largely live their lives within the walls of the monastery where they made their commitment, though even they do now leave temporarily for particular reasons.



Church of the Ascension Of The Lord, Balally Parish, Dublin, Ireland.

Photo taken during the 2025 John Main Seminar

Integral Christianity: The Vision of Celtic Christianity for the Crisis of the 21st Century

So, what does a promise of stability mean for the Benedictine Oblate today? Obviously not to live in one place for the rest of our lives.

Rather it’s a commitment to a pattern of daily life based on practices, values and principles derived from the Benedictine way of life and the Rule as we know them through the Benedictine community that we are involved in. For me, this is the New Zealand WCCM Oblate group. This stability is one aspect of a life commitment that also includes following with care the pattern all oblates have chosen: stability, along with obedience and a persevering with the pattern we have committed to – a *conversatio morum*.

The critical idea underlying stability is that spiritual growth comes from our commitment to a chosen regular spiritual regime, “the school for the Lord’s service,” as the Rule puts it in the Prologue. This is counter cultural in our society. We are oriented to thinking that a change or a new approach, innovation, will give rise to accelerated advancement in whatever area of human endeavour we are focusing on. Stability is one way, an aspect of the Benedictine way, of expressing a key aspect of the wisdom of our Christian faith tradition. This commitment is obviously,

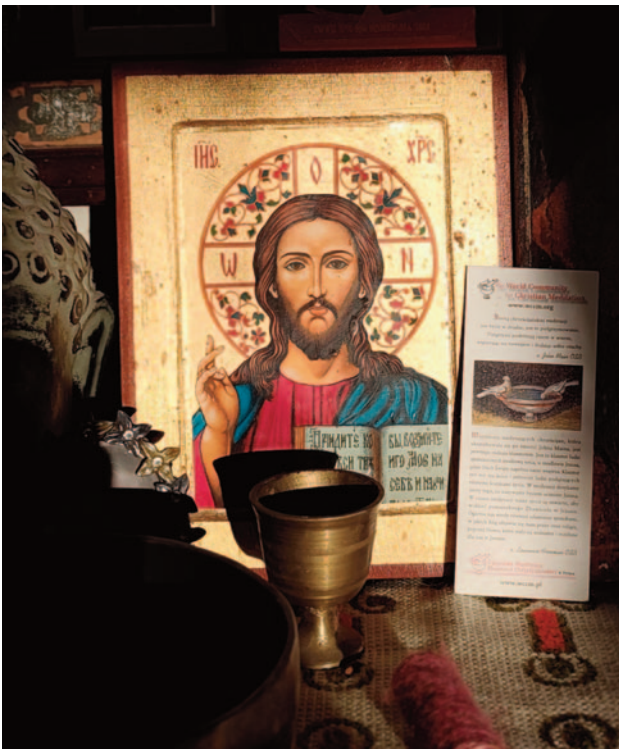
even for the monastic, not about never making changes in life. Rather, it is about making changes from within a stable spiritual commitment in which life is based.

For the WCCM Oblate our basic ongoing commitment is to the practice of regular twice daily meditation. This practice is not mentioned at all in the Rule as being part of monastic's regular pattern of daily life. Rather, prayer in the Rule is strongly focused on the divine Office, communally chanting the psalms seven times a day, complemented by an occasional reference to personal prayer. In Chapter 43 quote "Nothing is to be preferred to the work of God," that is the liturgy of the divine Office. As meditators we are committed to a regular pattern of meditation each day, just as the monastic is committed to a regular pattern of chanted prayer each day in the Office. Although it is not prescribed in the Rule, a regular meditative prayer practice fits well with a Benedictine commitment, and its underlying intention of supporting our spiritual growth. As is well known, though absent from the Rule and Western monastic practice, meditation is integral to other Christian and non-Christian monastic traditions. Our meditative prayer practice as Benedictine Oblates is complemented by a version of the Office, using the psalms, as we have today.

For the Benedictine monastic the rest of the Rule is not about doing certain special evangelical activities – like the various Roman Catholic religious orders - but rather about a ordinary life made up of their communal relationships and normal work activities, complemented by regular times of devotional reading. The Rule suggests certain values and principles - like silence and simplicity of life - that inform the monastic approach to these ordinary regular activities that are part of living in a community. These values and principles are a fruit of their prayer and reading. This focus on the ordinary way of life of the monastic, rather than on special religious activities, is one reason this form of spirituality works so well today as a way of orienting the layperson's life, supporting us in the various relationships and different activities that make up our ordinary lives. Our spiritual

growth comes through our commitment to a stable way of life.

So, the WCCM Oblate commits to stability as part of a group of practices, values and principles derived from Benedictine life and the Rule that provide a context for our regular pattern of meditation practice, supporting us to realize its potential in our own life in accord with the divine intention. Through our regular practice of meditation, we have a way of expressing stability that is not explicit in the Rule but we understand it as profoundly affirming its intent. Our regular meditative prayer practice provides a stable foundation that supports us in discerning the divine Word when we are facing changes in our way of life that come our way. **VV**



Icon scene

Photo by Tomasz Zontek-Łubianka

My Journey as an Oblate

Sandy Andrews – Australian Oblate

My name is Sandy Andrews and I was received as a full Oblate last year. I have been married to Jeff 49 years this August, and I am mother to two sons and Nanna to six grandchildren who all keep me very busy. I live in Adelaide, South Australia, and lead several Christian Meditation Groups. I belong to St Luke's Anglican Church, Modbury (a suburb of Adelaide). I love practicing yoga, walking, singing, reading, craft and gardening and play piano, guitar and recently ukulele. I love joining Benedictus Contemplative Church (Canberra, in the Australian Capital Territory) for on line meditation, and also Benedict's Well.

I was received as a full Oblate on November 28th 2025 during the WCCM Australia National Conference which was held in Adelaide last year. I gave a short talk after being received, which this article is based on.

My journey begins with a death, ends with new life, and in between there is immigration, a Facebook quiz and two gardens.....

My journey as an Oblate started when I began meditating as a young woman, recently married and living in England where I was born. My Mother died when I was 24 from breast cancer, and it was a difficult time and I found help and solace practicing yoga at an evening class. Yoga is a way of moving into stillness in order to experience the truth of who you are, and prepares for meditation. A few years later when I left a scientific career to have our first son, I decided to train to become a Yoga Teacher. My Father passed away in 1988, ten years after my mother, and in 1991 my husband and I decided to start a new life in Adelaide where his parents were living. It meant our two young sons would have grandparents, although it was hard to leave my brother and sister and their young families, as we were close. We joined the local Anglican Parish in Wynn Vale, Adelaide and a few years later in 1995 I saw an advert for Christian Meditation, which I found very surprising as I had not been encouraged to practice meditation in Church circles in England, and was often criticized for doing so. I had also experienced the year before a mysterious call to something, and was seeing a Spiritual Director to discern my direction.

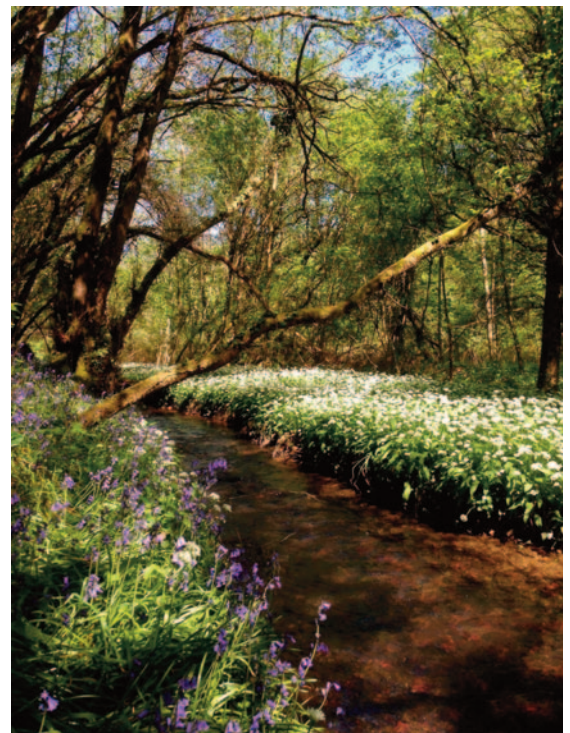
The priest at the local Church was going to the Christian Meditation meeting and we went together. Father Laurence Freeman was talking about Christian Meditation, and I started to meditate, and after some discernment, felt my calling was to share this form of prayer with people in my Parish. I set up Discovering Prayer sessions, which later became a Christian Meditation group. We listened to John Main and later Laurence Freeman talks on CDs before meditating. I attended an Essential Teaching Weekend, and continued to lead the groups and started other groups, one of which was at the request of a person who lived at Second Valley on the Fleurieu Peninsula, South Australia and had come across WCCM on the internet. A Friday group was started at Christchurch Anglican Church, Yankalilla in February 2022.

One day my friend Peta posted something on Facebook about doing a quiz to tell her what she should be, and the result was a nun! I read the post and wondered if she was aware of the Oblate path with WCCM. I didn't know much about it, so I looked it up and sent her the information. As I read the information, I suddenly realized that maybe this was my calling – from the crowd into

community, committing to a deeper searching for God and entering twice daily into the Prayer of the Heart, when I was usually only finding myself meditating once most days. I did not know much about the Rule of St Benedict at that time either, and it seemed to be worth exploring. So the year before last I began to enquire and go to the local cell meetings with South Australian Oblates Bev, Agnes and Lena, with Rosemary joining us by telephone. I was also fortunate enough to visit Bonnevaux Centre for Peace with my Husband in July 2024 and join in the 3 daily meditations and life lived around them. In October 2024 I began my time as a Novice at the October Cell Meeting at Lena's house, and was linked with my Mentor, Joy. Sadly Lena passed away in April 2025.

I began reading and studying and also joined the Benedictus Church community on line for meditation in the afternoon, and Benedicts Well from UK on Mondays – these were suggested by the National Oblate Co-Coordinator and were very helpful. I had doubts along the way, contacted my mentor feeling I wanted to give it all up, stumbled and fell a few times, but God is gracious and I attended the International Oblate Retreat from Bonnevaux online in October last year and was accepted to be received by Father Laurence a few weeks later. A new beginning I would never have thought possible! My Oblate journey has been a deepening and a focusing, a letting go of trying to be perfect, and a learning about community and its importance. As St Basil of the 4th Century said, "If you live alone, whose feet will you wash?"


I am fortunate to have two gardens to tend, and I see the gardener in me reflecting my spiritual path. I notice the plants always grow towards the light, as I feel called to grow towards the light of Christ within; the seasons affect the plants as the seasons of my life affect and challenge me. There is dying, rebirth and transformation. Sometimes I plant seedlings and they fail, but grace happens, and a seedling from an annual last year pops up all on its own and produces flowers and fruit. The paradox of dying to new life as the bulbs of spring make way for the summer petunias. The roots growing in the darkness of the rich earth, allow for fresh growth above ground, and are affected by the roots of other plants with which they share the earth, mirrors the suffering and darkness out of which comes wisdom and new perspective, and the importance of community. The watering that is required when the rain does not come, and the extra effort needed when the weeds have been left for too long, reflecting the times when I get off track. The regular practice of tending and looking after the plants like our twice daily meditation. The pruning which is needed for new growth which can feel uncomfortable but leads to freedom. And also the insects



Bonnevaux walk, Bonnevaux, France.
Photo from the Bonnevaux website

attacking me and the plants, like the distractions during meditation, must be tolerated and let go of gently, as using insecticide or force can damage the environment, and we are part of creation, not above it, a fact we can easily forget!

So the Oblate path may be summed up as “living an ordinary life with extraordinary awareness and commitment.”

“Here you have the essence of the Rule of St Benedict – to strive for God and to make your spiritual journey the underpinning reality of your life, finding its influence in everything you do, in everything you are. And if you do, the result is peace.”



The Stables, Accomodation at Bonnevaux, France.
Photo from the Bonnevaux website.

My trip to Bonnevaux **Darrell Taylor – Canadian Oblate**

It was a sunny September day when I arrived at the Bonnevaux Centre for Peace in France. I travelled from Ottawa to attend the International WCCM Oblate retreat. The taxi driver who drove me from Poitiers told me I was in for a treat. He was right. As we entered the grounds I was immediately struck by the serene beauty of the surrounding countryside, grassy slopes encircled by thick forest. The medieval Abby of yellow stonework was beautifully refurbished. I checked in at

the “stables.” The renovations were impressive. The old blended with the new. Simple designs, spacious, and naturally lit with the sun streaming thorough the many windows. It was to be a silent retreat. The peace and beauty of the countryside was amplified by our quiet contemplation.

The old barn was transformed into a conference centre. This created a large space perfect for meditation, sacred chant and communal celebrations. And it was here Fr. Laurence enlightened us with daily talks on Benedictine spirituality. In the afternoon we spread out in small groups occupying cozy nooks inside the various ancient buildings. There we shared what we were learning. Oblates had come from all over the world. There were three Canadians including myself. The staff were all very warm and friendly. The food was healthy basic fare and very tasty. Coming from Paris, it was a challenge adjusting to the silence and serenity. As often happens at such events, my personal demons made their usual appearance. My shadow self, born from a wounded past, voiced the usual criticisms and doubts. My inner critic was saying, “It’s all religious ego. Turn in your Benedictine cross and go home.” Ha!

After meditating for a number of years, I can now easily notice the voice of my shadow side. But there is another voice. It is the voice of inner wisdom. It calmly whispered, “Wait, be patient, stay open.” If there’s anything I have learned over the years from John Main’s teachings, it is not to take any thoughts too seriously. Even good thoughts can be distractions from the path if they feed our religious egos. We are not our thoughts. By the end of the retreat, I had had one of the most transformative experiences of my spiritual journey.

I made my final oblation in 2020 at the first, post-Covid, Canadian Christian Meditation conference in Ottawa. Paul Harris was my sponsor. In his humorous way he admonished me, “Becoming an Oblate doesn’t mean you’ll meditate any better.” How true. But the promises of stability, conversion and obedience do keep me a little more on track.

After my reception, I continued my daily meditation, prayer, scripture reading, and study of the Rule. I participated in my local church community, attended services, and led a small meditation group. In many ways becoming an Oblate confirmed what I was already doing. Going to Bonnevaux further affirmed my path. It was bearing good fruit. But bearing good fruit often involves painful pruning, (John 15).

As I approach the final stage in life (I’m soon turning seventy-one) Christian Meditation is even more imperative. The path does become a bit clearer at times, and I become a little freer of life’s encumbrances. It also becomes a bit easier to let go of the distractions. Let go. Let go. Let go. Simple, wise advice. But on some days, I wonder, where will this path lead me? Where will it all end? What will become of me?

On the last day of the retreat, I sat in our meditation circle. Things came to a head. During the retreat I felt my own spiritual poverty. John Main teaches meditation is simple and it simplifies us. But how simple does it have to get? How many things must I let go of? What about friends, family, children? At the retreat the silence became thick and heavy at times. It was as though I was dissolving into nothingness. I sensed my inner emptiness.

It was a paradox. The retreat at Bonnevaux invoked beauty, peace, serenity and provided supportive fellowship. At the same time, I was touching into my own existential dread, the barrenness of the inner void. Am I losing myself? What do I do? I must trust. Trust the teaching. Keep a loving focus on the prayer word. Say the Mantra. Marantha. Come Lord. The Lord comes. And the Lord indeed came, as always. vv



Cloister, Bonnevaux Abbey, France.
Photo from the Bonnevaux website

Volunteering at Bonnevaux

Beate and Derek Steller – Australian Oblates

When we told people that we've come all the way from Sydney, Australia to volunteer at Bonnevaux for five weeks, their first reaction was often, "Really? That's such a long way!" They probably also wondered why we'd travelled so far just to make beds and wash dishes!

At any given time, there are usually a handful of volunteers at Bonnevaux, each drawn for different reasons. Some come as travellers curious about community living; others are seeking a pause or renewal in their working lives. Yet, beneath these varied reasons, there is often a shared desire for spiritual growth and simplicity — a longing to reconnect inwardly while contributing practically to a life-giving community.

To volunteer at Bonnevaux is to consciously enter a contemplative rhythm of life. It means joining a community committed to the spiritual path, where the days are shaped by meditation,

prayer, and shared meals. Volunteers are invited to meditate four times a day with the community, to take part in morning prayers and reflections, and to work together in the kitchen, in cleaning, or wherever help is needed. We usually work through to midday prayer, sometimes continuing into the afternoon if required. Wednesdays are “desert days,” set aside for personal reflection, while Saturdays are personal rest days. This rhythm offers a sustainable and balanced blend of communal engagement and individual renewal.

This was, in fact, our second time volunteering at Bonnevaux. Our first visit, two years ago, coincided with our becoming oblates of the World Community for Christian Meditation. As oblates, we seek to live as “monks in the world” — embracing simplicity, regular meditation, spiritual reading, and service to others.

Returning this year allowed us to deepen our formation as oblates and to once again support the community. We have come home feeling deeply enriched by the experience. It has encouraged us to re-evaluate our lifestyle and our practice of contemplative living. We were inspired by the many people we met — from all around the world — who are also striving to live in a spirit of awareness and compassion. Meditating together daily creates a profound bond, and we have been blessed by the richness of these new friendships.

Working at Bonnevaux also reminded us that we are part of something greater than ourselves — a quiet but powerful response to a troubled world. Bonnevaux offers a space to nourish the soul, to rediscover inner peace, and to connect with others beyond the noise of division and individualism that so often defines modern life.

Yes, we will return to volunteer again. And we warmly encourage anyone who feels drawn to a more spiritual and contemplative way of life to consider doing the same — even for just a month. You don’t need to be an oblate to volunteer at Bonnevaux. All are welcome. vv



Derek and Beate (2nd and 3rd from the left) celebrating their wedding anniversary at Bonnevaux, France, with Josefa (left), Fr. Peter and Carmen (right).

The Unheard Music (A Reflection on John F. Deane’s poem) Noel Keating – UK Oblate

The Unheard Music

And then, in our sleaky, homemade boat, out
on the lake, we both fell silent, the oars, lifted
and dripping water on the surface, soft, softly,
something incomprehensible holding us, fragrance
breathing from the heathers, the low hills embracing,
and lake-water tapping gently against the timber bones

of the craft: we drifted, a long sustaining moment
in unannounced communion, as childhood drew

nearer to the rough-rock shores and our leaning bodies
grew firmer towards the tasks ahead; until

we rowed again, oars raking against the rowlocks, silence
persisting deep within us, swelling to a form of prayer

from Jonah and Me by John F. Deane (Carcanet, 2025)

What line or phrase resonates or stays with you from this poem? What thoughts and feelings does it evoke, and what does that tell you about what's asking for your attention?

John F. Deane was born on Achill Island, Co. Mayo. He has won many awards for his poetry and is a member of Aosdána, which honours artists whose work has made an outstanding contribution to the arts in Ireland. His latest collection, *Jonah and Me*, was published in December 2025 and contains this beautiful poem, a masterpiece of quietude.

For me, the poet paints a picture from a vantage point high above, looking down on a still, calm lake as a pair of rowers pause on their journey, to rest briefly and to enjoy the silence.

Laurence Freeman reminds us that, “according to Thomas Aquinas, contemplation is the simple enjoyment of the truth. Simple, without analysis, without planning, without having to explain it all, without having to control it – the simple enjoyment” of truth. The opening lines of this poem describe such a moment beautifully: out/ on the lake, we both fell silent, the oars, lifted/ and dripping water on the surface, soft, softly,/ something incomprehensible holding us.

The poem might be said to serve as a near-perfect allegorical map for the practice of meditation, describing as it does an organic shift from ‘doing’ to ‘being.’ In meditation practice, the first step is often the hardest: we must stop rowing. Our busy daily lives are defined by the metaphor of the oars – the constant striving to steer, propel, and control the direction of our lives. We build our identities – (the homemade boat) and we push them forward towards our planned, current destination.

Those who meditate will be drawn to see the practice of contemplation represented in the lifting of the oars, which is a deliberate decision to cease forward momentum. Deane captures the resulting quiet referring to the lifted oars dripping water on the surface, soft, softly,/ something incomprehensible holding us, fragrance/ breathing from the heathers, the low hills embracing,/ and lake-water tapping gently against the timber bones/ of the craft.

Every word chosen by the poet is like a considered brushstroke in a landscape painting. And the words resonate so well with our experience of meditation – the dripping water from the rested oars recalls the slow letting go of our thoughts; when we settle into the silence, we still ‘hear’ the residue of our doing as thought after thought floods the shore of our consciousness. We allow them to drip off us, soft and softly as we choose to simply be. And as the silence deepens the heart becomes aware of something incomprehensible holding us – this is the unheard music of the title which we apprehend with the eye of the heart rather than comprehend it with our mind.

Our practice teaches us that we do not need to constantly think our existence into being. In silence we discover we are moved beyond thinking into a deep, albeit ineffable, awareness of Reality. Once we set aside all doing, including thinking about doing, once we enter the deep silence we can hear the unheard music. The poet uses a wonderful metaphor that describes our state of consciousness as we experience the silence. The lake-water tapping gently against the timber bones/ of the craft evokes the felt sensation of the heartbeat beating within us in the stillness and silence, as we sit in a long sustaining moment/ in unannounced communion.

Our consumer society values doing over being and tends to view drifting as unhelpful, but our poet reframes it as a long sustaining moment. This reflects our understanding of meditation as a time of renewing and deepening our spiritual sensitivity. In meditation we choose to leave ourselves open and vulnerable to a graced encounter with the Divine, which occurs at a level of consciousness deeper than our everyday, 'doing' consciousness. We become willing rather than wilful, allowing the encounter to transform our way of seeing and being in the world.



Photo by Laurence Freeman—Malaysia

The poem ends where it must: back in the world of action. We cannot stay on the lake forever; we must pick up the oars again. And we find, as we return to the realm of doing, that our bodies grow firmer towards the tasks ahead ... silence/ persisting deep within us, swelling to a form of prayer. We apprehend that the quality of our action has changed. Our doing is now informed by our deeper sense of being – the unheard music – which persists deep within us. This is why we meditate – not to escape the world, but to change how we re-enter and engage with it. ■■■

NEWS

Benedict's Well Continues from the Benedict's Well team

Benedict's Well is an International online meditation and reflection group that meets on Zoom every Monday at 9 a.m. GMT for a total of one hour. The group is hosted by Benedictine Oblates of the World Community for Christian Meditation. It is open to anyone who wants to deepen their meditation practice, has an interest in the monastic tradition and would like the support of a

Benedictine Oblates for WCCM calls you to

BENEDICT'S WELL

"PREFER NOTHING TO THE LOVE OF CHRIST"
RULE OF BENEDICT 4:22

MONDAYS 9AM BST
ZOOM with LIVE STREAMING
<https://www.youtube.com/@benedictswell6373>

Let us drink of the wisdom of St. Benedict and
together be the well of love the world can draw from.

community online for their spiritual journey. Each week, there is a time of silent meditation with a reading to prepare us for meditation and then there is a guest speaker. The group is ecumenical and from all over the world, but united in meditation and the nourishment of shared reflection on their Christian faith journey. A regular speaker is Father Laurence. Over the 3 years that we have been meeting, many speakers have offered their reflections and wisdom. You may wish to offer your own reflections!

Please feel welcome to come to 'Benedict's Well' by sending an email to – wccmbenedictswell@gmail.com. We will then send you the weekly Zoom link. If you would like to watch previous sessions of Benedict's Well, you can find them on our YouTube page.

Please note we have a period of silent meditation at the beginning of our time together.

To view our YouTube page, click Benedict's Well logo above.

News From Campfire in the Heart
by Judi Taylor – Australian Oblate



Campfire in the Heart <https://campfireintheheart.com.au> always welcomes enquiries from those who'd like to volunteer, to be part of the life of the place joining the small resident community there, part of the vision for the place, in the ancient and wondrous setting of the Eastern MacDonnell Ranges, 7km from Alice Springs/Mbantua, in Central Australia.

Recently a particular opportunity has opened up to volunteer as a meditator-in-residence. **What does this involve?**

- ♡ Staying ideally between 2 - 6 months.
- ♡ Be a spiritual presence to work with and complement the offerings of the mangers there joining in all aspects of the day-to-day running of the place as need be.
- ♡ To offer daily times of meditation in the WCCM tradition.
- ♡ Discern how their particular gifts might best serve Campfire, perhaps in reaching out to the local community, offering an experience of Christian meditation and/or an invitation to 'come and see' the Campfire site. Maybe offering an introductory session/s or a quiet day. Perhaps in helping put together some guidelines on how to have a self-directed retreat at Campfire. The possibilities are as many as we are.



**Eastern MacDonnell Ranges
Central Australia**



The Labyrinth at Campfire in the Heart
Central Australia

In all things embodying the Benedictine values of hospitality, generosity and humility in relationship with those who living at or visiting Campfire

Each person's unique response to the place adds to the creative possibilities we can offer to those coming on retreat and the like

Accommodation is provided, we are calling for expressions of interest among WCCM meditators, both internationally and within Australia, from those who feel called by the spirit of Campfire and see themselves aligned with our Vision. It is an evolving possibility; we welcome your contribution to how it could develop.

Email Judi: taylor.judi@outlook.com

POEMS

You

I sometimes see your face in unlikely places
Both, where they said You would be found
But, surprisingly where no one looks

There You are
In the small and weak
The simple and earthly
The broken and the backward

Everywhere I look
There You are

Both in the darkness
and the light
In the sorrow
and the joy
In the noise
and the silence
All are gifts from You

All my life I have been looking for You
And now I have found you.
In the silent darkness
Touching the hem of Your garment

Darrell Taylor (Canadian Oblate)

TRANSFIGURATION

Although within a cloud
and cannot see aright
in you, we are transfigured
wrapped in robes of grace
need again to hear your voice
we are your beloved
nothing of our own we claim
you're well pleased to birth
truth and love creative

We may never live into
everything you've promised
yet as we learn to listen
in the midst of fear and change
we can follow down the mountain
no need to shelter there
open to your calling forth
let truth and love spring free

Anne-Marie Doecke (Australian Oblate)

N.B. Moses did not get to enter the promised land. Elijah would have given up except for the still, small voice. (Anne-Marie)

GIFT

I received something that I am.

I do not know what it is.
I only know that it is good.

What I am
is infinite and eternal.

I could name it,
but then it would no longer be That.

Yet I know that what I am
is the same
as what you are.

It is mysterious and hidden,
and at the same time simple, ordinary.

So we are That.
We remain as That.
An unceasing becoming
of what we are.

It is empty
and at the same time full.

It is That in which
everything happens,
has happened,
and will happen.

I am grateful for That.
For you, whom I am.
For all of you.
For myself.

The grace of being That.
The peace of being That.
The freedom of becoming That.
That One
which we are.

Tomasz Zontek-Lubianka (Polish Oblate)

THE INVISIBLE RIVER

God is the invisible life force,
Permeating creation
As an underground river.
The water flows eternally.

Atheists deny the river.
Deists see evidence of a possible river.
Agnostics catch glimpses of the river.
Believers have experienced the river.

The river is of the heart,
Right brain intuitive knowledge.
Beliefs are left brain mental constructs.
Faith is a right brain phenomenon.

We try to capture the river
Using theology, creeds, doctrines.
Religion is left brain.
The river defies imprisonment.

Left brain spirituality
Values words, reason, logic;
Manifesting as an oxbow lake,
Unconnected to the flowing river.

There is nothing between
Soul and river.
Christ exists in this nothingness,
Subtly seeking expression.

Searching for the river
Is a left brain futility.
In silence and stillness,
The river seeks us.

Rituals and symbols
Seem spiritually bilingual,
Mysteriously and mystically
Bridging heart and head.

Meditation and prayer
Prepare the body,
Opening spiritual eyes and ears.
Helping soul feel the river flow.

Death is returning to the river.
Death is incomprehensible.
Death frightens left brain spirituality.
Immortality is right brain assurance.

Fruits of the Flesh
End at death.
Fruits of the Spirit
Return to the river.

Between the river and the soul,
Nothing exists.
Soul returns
To the river.

Vernon Chandler (German Oblate)

INFORMATION

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Marie Louise Schmidt (International Oblate Coordinator – Denmark)

Eileen Dutt (UK)

Janet Robbins (UK – Member of UKOC)

Judy Taylor (Australia - Oblate Trustee)

Paul Taylor (Australia - Oblate Trustee)

Stefan Reynolds (NOC Ireland – Academy Faculty)

Taynã Malaspina (NOC Brazil – WCCM Coordinator for Meditation for Young People)

Dorothy Wood (NOC Canada)

Regional Oblate Co-Ordinators and National Oblate Communities

Dorothy Wood: North America, Canada (English & French speaking), USA, Caribbean

Taynã Malaspina: Brazil & Latin America, Portugal (Portuguese speaking)

Mary Meyer: Brazil & Latin America, Portugal (Spanish speaking)

Eileen Dutt: Estonia, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, France, South Africa

Janet Robbins: United Kingdom, Ireland

Stefan Reynolds: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Hungary & Netherlands

Marie Louise Schmidt: Italy

Paul Taylor: Australia, China, New Zealand, Philippines and Southeast Asia
(supported by Judi Taylor)

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