

The Oblate

THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD MAY BE GLORIFIED

Newsletter of the Oblates of St. Benedict
St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota 56321

Spring 2011

Volume 55, Number 2

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Spring 2011

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Special points of interest:

- Lent Recollection Day
March 20.
- Annual Oblate Retreat,
July 8-10, 2011
- Tour of the Pottery
Studio with Richard
Bresnahan, July 8,
3:00-4:45 pm (before
the retreat).

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From the Oblate Director: A Plea—

—FOR HUMBLE PRAYER AND HUMBLE SERVICE.

"Be people of prayer." Such is the oft-repeated advice given to us during workshops and days of renewal. But you may ask: "What kind of prayer? Meditation? The Rosary? The Psalms?" All such forms of prayer can nourish us for service to God and God's people, provided they are seasoned with one necessary ingredient: humility. Oblates must be people of humble prayer, just as they must be people of humble ser-

vice. The prayers people make have a way of saying much about God—the one to whom the prayers are addressed—and much about the ones who make the prayers. The Pharisee's prayer in the Gospel (Lk 18:9-14) reflects his belief that God has nothing better to do than listen to his recital of how good a man he is; it also reflects his belief that he is just a bit better, that he tries harder, that he has better ideas than his neighbors. The tax collector's prayer, on the

other hand, reflects his belief that God is eager to listen to a prayer made in humility, and also that he has no right to be anything else but humble: he knows that he is a sinner in need of God's mercy.

There is something lacking in this Gospel, however. God, to whom these two prayers are addressed, is silent: God does not respond to these two men and their prayers. What if God HAD responded to each of them?

(Continued on page 4)

Lent Day of Recollection, by Ron Joki, ObISB

A CONVERSATION ABOUT GOD'S CALL TO US

We have been blessed with so many wonderful speakers and retreat leaders over the years at Saint John's, people who have gifted us with gen-

erous, open hearts, towering intellects and spirits in touch with the divine. While I am least in all of these categories, I nonetheless have the privilege of offering some thoughts and framing the discussion on March 20

around the topic of "God's Call to Serve in Prayer and Action."

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...The disciple quickly puts it into practice out of reverence for God.

Pilgrimage, by Patricia Klucas, ObISB

SEEKING THE INCARNATE IN OUR DAILY LIVES

There is a long well-developed outline of this concept with colorful pictures available at paklucas@gmail.com. This will greatly add to the excellent presentation from the Advent Day of Recollection, and can be sent upon request. A summary apart from the pictures and the Sacred Texts follows.

The pilgrimage is a univer-

sal spiritual journey. All faiths that seek God by whatever name make pilgrimage in some way. We become seekers of the sacred as we pilgrimage through life.

In medieval Christianity people believed that "the sacred" consecrates its immediate environment, and that the concept of sight was that something went out of the eye and touched the object, and drew it into the window of the soul. There are five

parts of a pilgrimage, First, the pilgrimage calls to us, as with the angel Gabriel. The pilgrimage doesn't just happen. We are called; there is a longing; we are put into a situation. The risk for Mary and Joseph, Zechariah, and Elizabeth was inevitable. Who would understand? It seems impossible. But everything points to the way of the pilgrimage.

(Continued on page 9)

A Relevant Rule: Obedience by Peggy Stokman, ObISB

OBEDIENCE is so important to Father Benedict that he begins his 12 steps of humility with it. Chapter 5: "Almost at the same moment then, as the teacher gives the instruction the disciple quickly puts it into practice out of reverence for God."

I was relishing our creativ-

ity, inspiration and success as directors of our English Second Language program when John spoke out of the blue, "Honey, you are becoming tense and abrupt and difficult to live with. I think we should step down as directors." There was an instant knowing that John was God's voice of wis-

dom. While I later struggled and argued with God, my immediate 'yes' carried the day.

How can obedience bless your life?

Prayers

Please pray for our new candidates: Bruce Ervin, September 18, 2010; Teresa Roberts, October 16, 2010; James Secord, October 16, 2010; Aaron Humble, October 22, 2010; Laura Dunham, November 15, 2010; Lauraine Palm Singh, November 28, 2010; Candace Kropp, October 27, 2010, and Helen Wang, Febru-

ary 10, 2011. Also please pray for newly professed Oblates (correction in spelling) Aimee Beckmann-Collier and Wendy Peterson. Fred Jenkins Benedict Bartlett, November 1, 2010, Robert and Amy Gray, August 10, 2010 and David Anfinson, January 28, 2011 have joined them by making their final oblation. Please

pray for Fr. Patrick Riley who died after years of service in the St. Cloud Diocese.

THE OBLATE is a newsletter devoted to those interested in the Benedictine way of life, and provides a sense of community for Oblates of Saint John's Abbey living throughout the world.

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The Oblate

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Fall 2010

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Oblate Advisory Committee, by Chuck Seashore, OblSB

The Advisory Committee has had several meetings since the Summer 2010 retreat. We concluded that the event was successful and was anchored by an outstanding speaker in Dr. Jeanne LaCourt. The improvements in our registration process, both advance and on-site, resulted in less confusion and fewer complaints. The registration process was staffed entirely by Committee members. As usual, the entire retreat

was organized by the Director, Fr. Michael Kwatera, OSB. We are now turning our energy to the 2011 retreat where Fr. Eric Hollas, OSB, will serve as the Retreat Director. His theme will be "Finding Balance in a Chaotic World". A general feeling has been that the Saturday event schedule is too crowded to thoroughly appreciate and participate. With this in mind, a revised retreat schedule has been pre-

pared to include four conferences in the three days and some optional tours and activities moved to Sunday afternoon, as well as a tour of the Pottery Studio with Richard Bresnahan on Friday afternoon at 3:00 pm.

We continue to encourage submission of short articles to the Newsletter to the Editor, Jim Tembrock, OblSB, 1212 36th Ave. No, St. Cloud, MN 56303, 320-253-1564.

(Continued on page13)

Jeanne LaCourt: Summer Presentation Summary

This is a summary by Jeanne and the Editor of her 2010 retreat presentation.

Session one focused on general demographic, political and historical information about native people and nations.

Prior to Columbus' arrival in North America, 100% of

the land was inhabited by indigenous people. Because native people have an intimate relationship with the land, their mother, this land and their relationship to it is considered sacred. The European immigrants' need for land eventually caused many native people to be relocated and removed from

their original homelands and away from the medicines, foods and animals which taught them how to live in a balanced way in the world.

Native nations have always been, and continue to be sovereign nations.

(Continued on page 7)

Listening to
God is primary
to any
successful
endeavor in
life.

Contemplation and Action, by Ron Joki, OblSB

OBLATE GATHERINGS
AT SAINT JOAN OF ARC
CHURCH

The Oblates who have been meeting at Saint Joan's have continued to engage in an exploration of a deeper and more relevant meaning to their Oblation. As we know, listening to God is primary to any successful endeavor in life, so this is

where we hope to have started and where we want to stay grounded.

We began the season of meetings energetically with material from the last World Congress held in Rome in 2009 which sought to encourage and activate "Benedictine Oblates all over the world to 'become active participants in the great move-

ment for peace, justice and the protection of children...to move out of the narrow perspectives of our own place and culture with its challenges and problems, and through networking, ongoing education, intercultural encounters and relationships, to be getting closer to the whole picture of the global (Continued on page 7)

From the Oblate Director: A Plea for Humble Prayer and Humble Service (Continued)

HOW might God have responded to each of them? The Pharisee surely might have expected God to respond to him first, and so let's begin with him. Imagine God speaking to the Pharisee thus: "My dear Pharisee, why are you standing so proud and tall as you pray today? Trying to get the wrinkles out of your long robe? Trying to make sure that the tax collector in the back will see how prayer SHOULD be done? Well, you've given me quite a beautiful speech today—I dare not call it a prayer!—so why don't you sit down while I return the favor. Don't worry, your robes won't get wrinkled!"

"First of all, your remarks about not being like the rest of humanity are not new. I've heard them more times than there are stones in the Temple walls! You and so many others have told me that you are not like the wicked types of people. Well, let me suggest some WORTHY types of people that you ARE like!"

For openers, let's start with Adam and Eve. I created them to be my masterpieces of creation, and even gave them a dignity only a little less than the angels. I shared with them the power I have over all creatures. Yet somehow they became...well...proud...yes, that's it, PROUD—and they came to think that they knew more about good and evil than I did. Their pride led them to seek power over mysteries of life and death that lay beyond them—but not beyond me! All their descendants have shared in the sinful pride that shows how truly they are the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. You're a prime example of that, my dear Pharisee! Adam and Eve used their pride to rely on themselves rather than on me, but I never abandoned them

to their pride. They realized that their pride couldn't put them right with me, but that my love could. Do you think your pride will put you right with me?"

"Do you remember how proud the builders of the tower of Babel were? The Babelites thought they were different from all other men and women. Just as you think you are!—and they wanted everyone to know it—even me! So they set to work building a tower with its top in the heavens IMAGINE!—as if I needed a proud ugly intruder cluttering up my beautiful sky! 'Come, let us make a name for ourselves!' they cried. Name, indeed! I had to come down and take a closer look at that toy tower by which they were so sure they could win unity, fame, and security for themselves. Well, win a name they did—Babel—a name which means confusion! The pride of these people drew them far away from me before it drew them far away from each other through the confusing of their languages. Their pride didn't put them right with me or with one another: only my love and humanity's love for me and for each other, can do that."

"Of course, you remember Pharaoh and Moses. Pharaoh thought that divinity resided in him, a mere mortal!—what a PREPOSTEROUS thought!—and that he had a divine right to do anything he pleased to his own people and even MY own people, the Israelites! Pharaoh had one of the hardest hearts of all time, and it was pride that made it so! Well, I had to show Pharaoh through signs and wonders that I was greater than all the gods he could muster, and the Exodus of my people from Egypt really turned things upside-down for him. He who thought himself so great and almighty lived to hear his whole nation mourning for its first-born and to see his charioteers lying face down in

And this is indeed what it does for me. This is a wonderful kind of scholarship, one that warms the heart, and helps with discovery. (Not one that dries things out and almost kills them). I am not reading it from cover to cover. Rather, I use it daily with one of the psalms of the morning prayer. It is great help to lectio. (No, I am not getting any commission, but just wanted to share this.)

Retreat Possibilities by Trisha Day

I'm writing on behalf of the Cistercian sisters at Our Lady of the Mississippi Abbey south of Dubuque, Iowa with information about several retreat opportunities that may be of special interest to Benedictine Oblates, especially those who are looking for formation resources.

The retreats will feature the DVD series, THE MONASTERY, a beautifully produced television documentary that was filmed at Mississippi Abbey but never broadcast. Thanks to the generosity of a donor, the sisters have developed a set of supplemental materials to accompany the DVDs as a means of helping people gain a deeper understanding of Benedictine values and practices that can be incorporated into their lives. These materials include a manual containing information and resources about the spiritual life, as well as program planning and facilitation guidelines for those who would like to use the television documentary with their Oblate communities, as well as with their local parishes and/or other faith sharing groups.

The Sisters are pleased to be able to invite Benedictine Oblates as well as Lay Cistercians and others who are interested in monastic values and practices to attend one of these

retreats, and have prepared a website with additional information:

<http://themonasteryretreats.org>

It is the Sisters' hope and prayer that the documentary filmed at Mississippi Abbey will be of help to many people on their journey to God. If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact me directly at pmday@wisc.edu.

Oblate Advisory Committee (Continued)

These should reflect items of interest to all readers in a concise newsletter format. The use of artwork is encouraged to avoid endless narrative. Due to marginal attendance at the Advent Day of Reflection in December of 2010, we probably will move this event to November to avoid weather surprises and a growing list of pre-Christmas events. We have also discussed an Oblate years of service recognition to be marked at the retreat for those individuals who have been active Oblates for many years. The next meeting of this committee will occur at the Lent Day of Reflection at St. John's on March 20. Any interested individuals are invited to attend and actively participate.

Chuck Seashore, ObISB, Chair of the Advisory Committee

cemetery space availability. To date, a total of 275 spaces have been reserved, with 32 of these purchases made by Saint John's Oblates. Some of these were purchases made at the time of need; but the majority of the reservations have been advance, or pre-need purchases. The process of a pre-need purchase includes selecting a preferred burial lot or cremation wall site and then filling out the paperwork and arranging the payment, or setting up a payment plan. Oblates also receive a discount on the price of most lots and niches (excluding the estate sections). Purchases may be completed either in person or via mail or e-mail.

To request an information packet, or to arrange a tour, contact Josie Stang at the Saint John's Abbey Cemetery Office at 320-363-3434, or at jstang@csbsju.edu, or check out the web site at www.saintjohnabbeycemetery.org.

From Fr. Geoffrey Fecht, OSB Director of Abbey Development

On Saturday, April 16, Oblates are invited to the vigil service for Palm Sunday. We will also be inviting top donors and neighboring parishioners to attend. A reception in the Chapter House will be held afterwards. A special way for Oblates (and others) to begin Holy Week. If you wish to stay overnight in the guesthouse, you should make reservations (320-363-2573).

Also, next spring (2012) the abbey will be sponsoring a Benedictine Heritage Tour to Italy. Special Benedictine sites will be visited: Nursia (birthplace of Saints Benedict and Scholastica) Subiaco (first monastery), Monte Cassino (burial place of both Saints Benedict and Scholastica;

Assisi (Benedictines gave Francis his first chapel), and Rome. April 10-21, 2012. Contact Fr. Geoffrey Fecht, OSB, at Abbey Development (320-363-3818) for more information.

Finally, in commemoration of the Abbey Church's 50th anniversary this October, donations for the fabrication of a new church processional cross, candle stands (4) and paschal candle stand are welcome. Contact Abbey Development for more information.

Book Review by Lucie Johnson, OblSB

A while back, I bought a copy of the book "Psalms" by Konrad Schaefer, in the Berit Olam series. I have found it wonderful... bringing much more depth and delight in my reading of psalms. It has enabled me to "enter" them at a level I cannot do on my own, and it "opens" the psalms in a way. It is sold at Liturgical Press and on Amazon.

Here is a part of the editorial review: In Psalms, Schaefer focuses on the structure of each psalm, its dramatic plot, the modes of discourse, the rhetorical features, and the effective use of imagery to portray theology and the spiritual life. Schaefer portrays each poem's inner dynamic to acquaint readers with the poet and the community which prayed and preserved the composition, allowing the believer to transpose it in the contemporary situation. Psalms is for those who would like to pray the psalms with more intensity of meaning; for those willing to touch the Biblical world and taste of its fruit in the W and for devoted readers of the Bible to become more expert as it helps experts become more devoted.

slimy mud—a deadly humiliating experience! Pharaoh had little room left in his heart for pride after that. Pride like Pharaoh's—or like yours, my dear Pharisee—never puts a person right with me!"

"Now I know that you have to get home for supper. I guess you do have to eat like other mortals!—so let's stop here for today. You can't go away RIGHT with me—but just go away!" And the Pharisee did.

The tax collector had been waiting patiently for God to finish speaking to the Pharisee. God now spoke to the tax collector: "The proud heart is puffed up with many words—the proud heart is like a hothouse for weeds! Your brief prayer comes from a heart that is humble. It echoes the humble, contrite prayer of your ancestors in the faith all the way back to Moses, a man who really knew how to ask for mercy. Do you remember when the people of Israel sinned against me by worshipping the golden calf? Moses cried out to me: 'O Lord, I pray you, go in the midst of us, although it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.' Moses knew that I put my people right with me when they seek my forgiveness. Thus they show that they really are my people."

"King David, I think, had one of the humblest hearts I ever created. You remember how he desired to have the beautiful Bathsheba, and even had her husband killed in battle so that he could possess her. But David repented of his sin, and made a contrite plea for mercy: 'Have mercy on me, God, in your kindness, in your compassion blot out my offense. A humbled contrite heart you will not reject!' How could I ignore or reject a plea like that? I did not reject David because of his sorrow and humility; his

humble heart was big enough to accept my forgiveness and let it put him right with me."

"Do you remember that holy man, Tobit? He was famous for his many charities to the Israelites who went with him into exile. Once he reproached his wife for stealing a kid goat, but she had really received it as a bonus. She replied to him as only she could: 'Where are your charities and righteous deeds now? You seem to know everything!' Well, that made Tobit weep in his grief and made him recall how sinful he and all his people had been. Then he prayed to me: 'You are righteous, O Lord, and all your deeds are just; O Lord, may you be mindful of me, and look with favor upon me. Punish me not for my sins, nor for my unwitting offenses, nor for those of my ancestors. I am overwhelmed with grief.' Tobit's great humility and sorrow opened him to my great mercy, and from that day, I began to work great things in his behalf. Tobit's advice is still good: 'If you turn to the Lord with all your heart, he will turn back to you and hide his face no longer.' You, my beloved tax collector, have turned back to me in humility and sorrow for your sins, and I have not hidden my face from you!"

"Yours is the saving faith and saving humility by which my sons and daughters place their trust in me, and not in human pride. Yours is the faith and humility that put you right with me. You know that I scatter the proud-hearted, and raise up the lowly—such in fact are the beautiful words that a woman most dear to my heart proclaimed years ago. Those who exalt themselves shall be humbled, while those who humble themselves shall be exalted. Now go in my peace." And the tax collector went home right with God.

The grace that puts us right with God is a gift, not a reward. We respond gratefully to God's

The fifth stage is that the pilgrimage doesn't end when we get there. Coming home transformed and enriched with a new sense of the incarnate. Coming home changed is another journey. Ps. 27: One thing do I ask of the Lord, this I do seek, to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the splendor of the Lord and visit within God's sanctuary.

We are both seekers and dwellers. We seek to dwell in the house of the Lord, to visit within God's sanctuary. Everyday is a pilgrimage. We do not always leave home to pilgrimage; it is our journey within: our journey to the incarnate; our journey to transform—as Mary transformed and birthed a child.

We are transformed as in our journey with Benedict to continual conversion, continual circumambulation in order to change. We meet the stranger everyday, the stranger who becomes the Incarnation of Christ in our lives.

"Ultreya" is a Spanish word, derived from the original Latin, meaning "Onward!" Or "Persevere!" "Go forward! Go beyond!" It was in common use by pilgrims in the Middle Ages to greet and to encourage one another along the way. (Rosanne Keller, PILGRIM IN TIME. Liturgical Press, 2006).

The tradition of a nativity pilgrimage in Spain: Las Posadas is a religious celebration that starts on the sixteenth day of December and continues for nine consecutive evenings. Las Posadas is a reenactment of the search for shelter for the birth of the baby Jesus. Las Posadas includes a procession led by children, followed by adults and musicians. They travel to a different house in the village or neighborhood each night looking for lodging.

In memory of Joseph and Mary's search for a room at the inns of Bethlehem, they form a procession with two children carrying figures of Joseph and Mary from a crèche. It is not usually a church celebration, but rather, a family or neighborhood one. At each door Joseph and Mary knock and ask for entrance, but are refused. Typically they are refused at three houses before they are let in.

http://www.netglimse.com/holidays/las_posadas/celebration_of_las_posadas.shtml

Contemplation and Action, by Ron Joki OBlSB (Continued)

situation. On the one hand the reality of a sick world, torn apart by war, injustice and destruction, on the other the vision of a world in which a deep ecumenical, inter-religious and intercultural dialogue is working toward a world healing process."

To understand how God can accomplish this work, we looked at the Community of Saint 'Egidio which started in Rome and has spread around the world. This led us to a global as well as a local vision for bringing the spirit of Benedictine monasticism to root causes of societal problems.

By the time this is published, we will, at our February meeting, hope to have balanced and complemented this very active focus by a discussion of another important element of the Benedictine tradition, the practice and gifts of meditation/contemplation which brings us back to listening to the Spirit with an open heart.

We trust that God will guide us in just the way we need to continue to be an active part of God's work in the world while staying centered in the Spirit.

We invite you to join us at our meetings, March 13, April 10, and May 15. For more information, contact Ron Joki at rejslp@aol.com or 952-544-4525.

Summer Presentation by Jeanne Lacourt, (Continued)

The first political dealings with the American government were through treaties and were negotiated between two or more sovereign entities. Over 800 treaties were negotiated, with 400 being ratified. Most of the treaties were to obtain native land. Because of treaties, land allotment, and illegal land theft, native people have been divested of their lands and now only occupy 4% of their original 100% land holdings.

Estimates differ on the population of indigenous people in the North America prior to Columbus' arrival. The generally accepted number is near 33 million. Today, according to the 2000 census, Native people make up only 1% of the U.S. population. This number increases to 1.5% if mixed race (native and another race) are counted.

The second session focused on viewing the Rule of St. Benedict through indigenous eyes and looking at what the differences are in these two cosmologies

One of the main differences that stands out is the linear versus circular thinking. If one were simply to look at the symbols used to represent Christian and Native religious traditions, one could easily see this. Christianity's main symbol is the cross "t" whereas among many indigenous groups the symbol is the circle "O". Other differences in symbolism include: for Christianity, God is seen as a "father" whereas with many indigenous tribes, the Creator has no gender. God the Father is to be feared, his people are born into the world with sin, fear his abandonment and have been removed from his garden. Among tribal people, the Creator is

nothing to fear, we are not born sinners and we are still living in our “garden”.

The use of language is another area where the Rule stands out when looking at it through indigenous eyes. The Rule tends to use a language of hierarchy where these words can be found throughout: superiors, seniors, kingdom, rule, obey, submit, orders, commandments, etc. These words show hierarchy of authority, of place, of ideology. Perhaps the most striking way in which hierarchy is evident is in the privileging of humans in the creation story. Among tribal people, animals, ancestors and spirit beings all play central and key roles in origin and creation myths. Human ascendancy is not the norm, in fact, many tribes believe that because animals have been here much longer than humans, we humans are the most ignorant of living in this world and seek help from our animal relatives.

The last session focused on where there are similarities in the Rule and with indigenous spiritual cosmologies.

The Rule and indigenous cosmologies meet eye to eye in several areas: The way the sick, children and elders are treated; how possessions are viewed, the sense of humility, and perhaps most importantly, “listening with the ear of your heart.”

The native view is of humanity profoundly connected with nature, like “We are the rain”. Modern science often shows disconnect between nature and humanity, splitting the two asunder. The Benedictine admonition to listen with your heart, as mentioned above, is an invitation to become reunited again with appreciation and a disavowal of destructive controlling pride. The chapter on the twelve steps of humility is highly receptive therefore to

human minds. The admonition to pray always reminds us that God is present everywhere and at all times, fundamental to native religious thought. The listening and respect of elders, in native thought the ones who told stories, as well as the elevation of the value of the sick, showing the importance of communalism, were highlighted. Having common possessions reflects the native generosity whereby the land is sacred, so how can it be possessed by only one? The hard work of the hunt and the gathering must be shared by all.

Thus in many ways, “That in all things may God be glorified”, that most beautiful and powerful statement of the Benedictines is indeed shown by the natives’ constant praying in appreciation for the gift of life and love which has been granted to them. Certainly different cultures and histories involving thousands of years make a difference. Still, it is amazing how close the similarities are, as long as there really is appreciation for nature and worship for God. And as for St. John’s, I am sure its exemplary preservation and protection of its lakes and land surely reflect the common similarity of both traditions. At the end of the session, all received a “smudging” send-off, using sage-like incense and waving smoke with an eagle feather. All were standing in the sacred circle, also enclosed by the angels of the Great Hall, with their feet almost touching the orbs, a very moving experience, reflecting the sacred nature of circles and smoke rising. The abbot does something similar every Saturday evening at the beginning of the vigil of Sunday, with the incense ascending towards the Cross, and part of a psalm is chanted referring to incense ascending towards God. The sense of the holy is indeed often similar even in very different traditions of time and place.

Patricia Klucas: Pilgrimage (Continued)

The second factor is the decision to go, to make the journey, no matter where it takes you. Acceptance comes through prayer, discernment...quiet moments with God and with myself. This is the “yes” of Joseph and Mary. Yes doesn’t happen right away...The decision to go means yes. There are fears, but yes I am willing to accept the difficulties, to continue when all seems impossible, but am willing to change my life forever. My pilgrimage is my own personal journey; I will do all of this and I will be alone, alone except for God, and there will be good times, awesome times...as well as hard times.

The third stage is the preparation for the journey, through more prayer, thought, asking questions, and sitting with God. What shall I bring? What shall I need? What shall I leave behind? Do I know what road to take? Mary, leaving to see Elizabeth, brought questions, fears, curiosity, and doubts. She is leaving behind her childhood, the safety of a life she knows to follow the road God has chosen, knowing that her life was changing before her eyes. As seekers our pilgrimage can take many paths. We may physically go on a journey seeking the sacred in a physical setting. We may go on a spiritual journey through our own daily trials seeking enlightenment. We may need to find our roots, visit a grave, family unseen for many years. We may take on a new job; we may have lost a job that we had. We may start school, follow a path to becoming an Oblate, a monastic. We may need to visit our homeland because a census has been called.

“The Arabic word for pilgrimage (hajj) is indirectly related to Ishmael’s mother, Hajar, (or as we have been spelling it in English, Hagar). Both come from an ancient Semitic-language-

root that means to change one’s place, to leave, or become a ‘stranger’. Hagar is one who leaves her home and becomes a mother of a new nation. The word for pilgrimage represents an action in which we turn, circle, or circumambulate in order to change our ideals, which we now re-evaluate in the light of a larger reality...” (The Tent of Abraham, p. 163.) (Joan Chisttister, OSB, Murshid Saadi Christi, Rabbi Arthur Waskow. Boston; Beacon Press, 2006.)

Stage four is setting out on the pilgrimage; for Mary and Joseph, as for us, it only just begins. The journey itself involves the greatest risk. In medieval maps, in the places unknown, it was often written “here be dragons!” Where will we stay? Will we have food? Will we be safe? The journey is catalyst for a more vital awareness of ourselves and God. We will be changed! We must face our fears. We must trust. As we pilgrimage, we move out of ourselves and eventually we return within. One pilgrimage can be part of another larger pilgrimage. India? PhD? What work will I do when this part is done??? What will I learn?

This is an opportunity to let the past go and journey through time. But a pilgrimage is always right now! A pilgrimage is always alone, even if we go with other people—a solitary experience. D.H. Lawrence: “The soul is the open road, (and) it is a wayfarer down the open road!” It is always an inner journey, even if we go to a historic place. As with Mary, no matter where we go, the Incarnate is within us. That is what we seek. We meet the Incarnate in ourselves, in the stranger along the journey, or in the stranger—the pilgrim who comes to our door. When the pilgrim comes to us, we become part of their journey. Do we let the pilgrim in? Is there room in the inn?