

# The Oblate

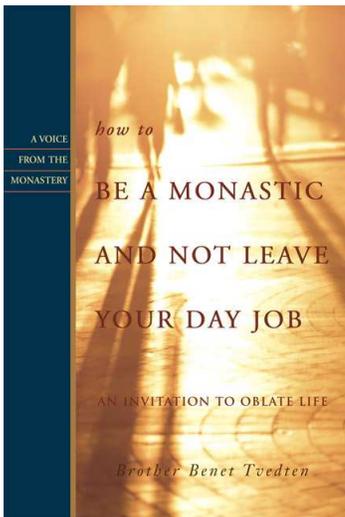
*Newsletter of the Oblates of Saint John's Abbey*

Spring/Summer 2013

Volume 57, Number 2

## **OBLATE RETREAT JULY 12-14, 2013**

**Brother Benet Tvedten, O.S.B.** was oblate director at Blue Cloud Abbey in South Dakota from the 1970s until the monastery's closing in August of 2012. He served a term as the coordinator of the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors.



His book on oblates, *How to Be a Monastic and Not Leave Your Day Job*, is being reprinted this fall by Paraclete Press with an emphasis on spirituality for "Benedictine Oblates and Other Christians Who Follow the Monastic Way." (See the review by Pam Keul on page 9.)

Brother Benet is also the author of *The Motley Crew: Monastic Lives*, published by the Liturgical Press.

Although he was invited, not to say "recruited," to consider joining us here at Saint John's, Brother Benet has now returned to North Dakota, the state where he was born and raised. He comes to us from Assumption Abbey in Richardton, North Dakota. It was at Saint John's, however, where he fell in love with the Benedictines as a college student in the 1950s.

He takes the retreat title from Sister Joan Chittister's book *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily*, in which she writes: "The spirituality that emerges from the *Rule of Benedict* is a spirituality charged with living the ordinary life extraordinarily well."

The topics of Brother Benet's conferences will deal with living according to the *Rule*, illustrated by examples of people who have lived ordinary lives, some of whom have done extraordinary things.

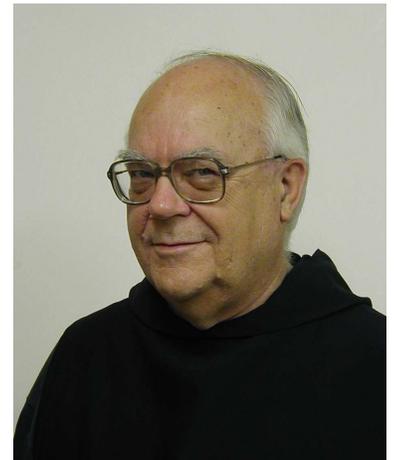
**Registrations for the oblate retreat are coming in slowly. If you have not done so, please register as soon as possible.**

Also consider sponsoring a fellow oblate who cannot afford either the fee or the transportation for the retreat. Costs are listed on the registration form, but a gift of any amount will be both helpful and appreciated. Retreat time is perfect for remembering that "we're all in this together."

If you need a hard copy of the registration form, just call or write with your request.

[Online registrations](http://www.saintjohnsabbey.org/oblates/index.html) (<http://www.saintjohnsabbey.org/oblates/index.html>) will be accepted from now until July 5, 2013.

Your room will be reserved for you, but it cannot be designated until you check in.



### **Schedule Highlights of Oblate Retreat**

#### **July 12:**

1:00—5:00 p.m. Check-in at Mary Hall Conference Center  
8:00 p.m. Investiture of candidates, opening conference.

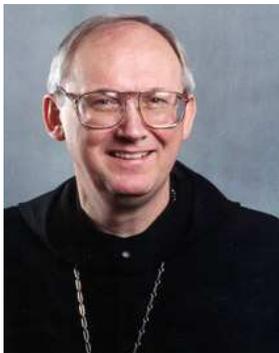
#### **July 13:**

11:30 a.m. Mass with renewal of oblation.  
5:00 p.m. Evening Prayer with final oblation.

#### **July 14:**

10:30 a.m. Eucharist, lunch and departure.

## Letter from Abbot John



Dear Oblates,

In April two of our Benedictine confreres died, starkly reminding us to “keep death daily before our eyes.”

For almost thirty years, Brother Gregory Eibensteiner directed the Abbey Woodworking shop. It would be hard to find a place on this campus that does not have furniture made at Abbey Wood-

working in this timeframe. Student desks, bed frames, chairs, office desks, wardrobes, SJ Bible cabinets, caskets: you name it, abbey woodworking makes it.

Brother Gregory was not only a good woodworker and a good designer - he was a creative problem solver. One of our oblates, who was losing her vision and had learned braille, went to Abbey Woodworking and met with Gregory. She asked him if he could make a “braille stand” for her, something like a portable, free-standing lectern, but specifically for use with braille.

Brother Gregory spent a whole morning with her, getting the right wood, making sure he understood what she needed. He designed it for adjustable height, with a reduced angle on the top part, with a small edge along the bottom of the shelf. She used that lectern in her ministry in parishes for many years and continues to do so when she is filling in somewhere, for the proclamation of the Gospel. Every time she uses it to proclaim the Gospel she remembers Gregory and the shop.

Father Kevin Seasoltz often said that a monastic life well lived should prepare one to die. This could sound like a symptom of untreated depression. But Kevin intended it in the sense of really understanding and owning the reality of death for each one of us, not in a general sense, but personally, and living into the dying and rising of Jesus. Countless students, seminarians and others benefited from Kevin’s courses, conferences and homilies on liturgy, sacraments, and sacred art. Last November, the oblates were blessed with Kevin’s final public conference.

The ultimate symbol of Christian faith and love is the cross. It tells everyone that we are aligned as individuals and as a community with the dying of Jesus Christ on the cross. We are saying that the love that Jesus, the Son of God, has for the world is stronger than death. The wood of the cross is not dead wood - it blossoms into a new life. Jesus, through his death and resurrection, makes a new path through death to life.

We need people around us who show us how to live the Gospel. We also need people around us who show us how to die as faith-filled, hope-filled Christians. Brother Gregory and Father Kevin surely did this for us.

## Letter from Father Don

Dear Oblates,

After broken bones, hip replacement “revision” surgery, and follow-up therapy in rehab facilities, I’ve been experiencing what St. Benedict teaches in Chapter 36 of the *Rule* for life in “The School of the Lord’s Service.” What does he say? “Before all things and above all things, care must be taken of the sick, so that they will be served as if they were Christ in person; for he himself said, “I was sick, and you visited me” (Matt 25:36), and, “What you did for one of these least ones, you did for me” (Matt 25:40).

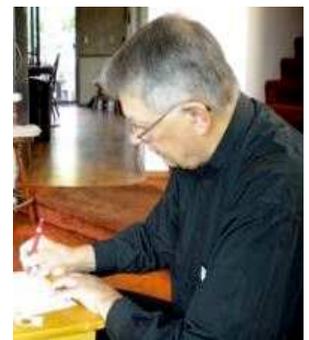
Of course, as Benedictines, whether monk or oblate, we are called to treat the sick and the elderly with respect and care that honors and protects their dignity. Yes, even when they are cranky or demanding, which Benedict recognizes as he admonishes the sick to “consider that they are being served for the honor of God, and let them not annoy those who are serving them by their unnecessary demands.” These past months of rehab are showing me that even patients have to be patient with other patients!

It is a sad fact that elder abuse does occur. Here I would extend the meaning of “elder” to any vulnerable person, old or young. Only rarely do we receive news reports of the verbal and psychological abuse that happens in private homes. More often, if we allow ourselves to listen carefully, we hear laments of neglect, misunderstanding, complaints, and disrespect. Being sick, disabled, or old is more burdensome than pleasurable, and sensitivity to this concern is something Benedictines want to develop.

With only one exception in these past six months, I can say that I have been treated as if I were Christ in person. The exception was not enjoyable, so when I think that many oblates are caring for children, spouses, aging parents, or other persons needing their care, I am filled with admiration for the holy service they (you) perform.

Actually, our every environment or setting is a room in the school of the Lord’s service. Here we learn again and again how Christ appears—so often as a weak, disabled, or sick person. But the setting can be the waiting room in a dentist’s office, a car in a traffic jam, an aisle in a grocery store, or (!) the church and/or its parking lot. What a challenge our beloved St. Benedict sets before us, to treat others as if they were Christ himself. Sometimes we just might have to reconsider what we think of Christ after all. He certainly does seem fond of appearing in disguise, anytime, anywhere.

May this long awaited summer be a time of rest and renewal, seasoned with enjoyment and filled with wonderful memories.



## News Briefs

### Lenten Day of Reflection: March 2013

by Jim Tembrock, Obl.S.B.

"Lived Experience as Celebrated at Triduum" was a very appropriate topic for the day of reflection, coming soon before Holy Week. Triduum refers to the days of Holy Thursday through the Easter Vigil. In her presentation, Sister Michaela Hedican, O.S.B., noted that the Triduum is not an anniversary, not a re-enactment, but a celebration now of salvation history. The profound stories of death and rebirth are experienced anew. Life has triumphed over death, so we are moved to choose life over death.

In the early church, believers were excommunicated for three serious sins: adultery, murder, apostasy. After their Lenten penance and public confession, they were reunited with the community on Holy Thursday. Our Holy Thursday liturgy includes the washing of feet, once a part of Middle Eastern hospitality. The bread and wine at the Eucharist are symbols of life, bringing the life of Christ to believers.

On Good Friday, Christ chooses to become the suffering servant, leading to the victory of light over darkness. Christ is the I AM, when he states: "I am He." The inscription on the cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews," testifies to his servant-kingship, even though his kingdom is not of this world.

Holy Saturday is filled with many elements of ritual, illustrating with final joy the conflict between darkness and light. The paschal candle, the *Exultet*, the many scriptural readings, the blessing of water and the celebration of baptism all proclaim triumph of life over death, effected by the risen Christ as celebrated in the Eucharist.

In a sense, the final word is that we disciples are now told to go and live out this new life and love by proclamation and action.

Sister Michaela's presentation is available as an audio recording. You may contact the oblate office to request it, or you may order an audio CD for \$5 prepaid.

Order through the oblate office by mail (Oblate Office, PO Box 2015, Collegeville, MN 56321), or email [oblates@csbsju.edu](mailto:oblates@csbsju.edu), or call 320-363-2018.

### International Congress

Jim Tembrock, Obl.S.B., at his own expense, will represent Saint John's Oblates at the Third World Congress of Benedictine Oblates in Rome on October 4-10, 2013. The Abbot Primate, Notker Wolf, O.S.B., emphasizes that this Congress is not an attempt to centralize the various groups of oblates. The intention is, rather, to deepen their contacts with one another and, most importantly, their links with their monasteries of oblation. Jim's report will appear after he returns.

### New Abbey Webpage

Saint John's Abbey has redesigned its webpage with improved navigation, up-to-date calendars, and a more attractive format. The webpage design will also be easier to view on tablet computers and smartphones. Of course, this means that our oblate section of the main webpage will also see new features. The new webpage design should be up and running sometime in June.

### NAABOD

Father Michael Peterson, O.S.B., Assistant Oblate Director, will be attending The North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors (NAABOD) in Bismarck, ND from July 12-17. This organization provides assistance to and ongoing formation for directors of oblates. It provides a forum for discerning needs and issues associated with this formation activity and guidelines for leadership and the oblate way of life. Father Michael is sorry that he will miss our annual oblate retreat, which runs at the same time, but the NAABOD conference should provide great stimulus toward improving the Saint John's Oblate Program.

### Oblate Institute

Oblates are invited to the Oblate Institute at Sophia Center in Atchison Kansas July 18 - 21, 2013. The speaker is Sister Karen Joseph, O.S.B. from Immaculate Conception Monastery in Ferdinand, Indiana. Her topic is *A Timeless Treasure: The Legacy of St. Benedict*. Sister Karen has given numerous retreats and workshops including the Monastic Studies Program at Saint John's, Collegeville and was a staff member of the Benedictine Women's Renewal in Rome. As Abbot Jerome Kodell, O.S.B., writes of her, "She is an excellent mentor in Benedictine spirituality." Sister Meg Funk, O.S.B., writes, "Her wit and wisdom are second to none in her presentations." For more information, contact Sister Michaela Randolph, O.S.B., at [micaela@mountosb.org](mailto:micaela@mountosb.org).

### Local Oblate Chapters

A little-known group of oblates by the name of Saint Paul Oblates meets monthly on the second Saturday @ 5:30 p.m. in Central Towers High-rise, 20 Exchange Street East, #301.

Contact: Ann Gallivan (651.215.4618) or e-mail Ramona Pekarek <[peka0025@umn.edu](mailto:peka0025@umn.edu)>

Meetings include the Oblate Prayer, Liturgy of the Hours with prayer intentions, Scripture reading and reflection. Interested oblates are always welcome.

The Collegeville, Red River Valley, and Joan of Arc chapters will reconvene in September. See the abbey website for contact information.

## Local Chapters



**Joan of Arc chapter, May 2013.** Inset, lower left: Jim Secord, photographer. L to R, front row: Teresa Roberts, Bill Muldoon, Chuck Seashore, Dolores Seashore. Back row: Donna Mirocha, Elizabeth Everitt, Chet Mirocha, Phil Gerlach, Father Mike Peterson, O.S.B., Ron Joki, Carl Rosen, Lucie Johnson.



**Red River Valley chapter, April 2013.** L-R: Judy Doll, Mark Strobel, Fr. Tom Feltman, Don Kercher, Steve Dusek, Marty and Carol Wolla. Photo by Fr. Michael Peterson, O.S.B. Empty chair for Father Don Tauscher, O.S.B., who had been recuperating in Collegeville, but he did join the group for their meeting in May. [Photo by Michael Peterson, O.S.B.]

## In Memoriam

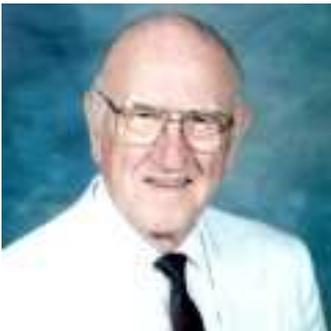
In our prayers we remember the recently deceased:

**Monica Sturm**, 63, of New Ulm, died February 7, 2013 at the Divine Providence Home in Sleepy Eye, Minnesota. She graduated from the College of St. Teresa in Winona in 1971 and used her degree in theology as director of religious education for the St. Mary's Parish in New Ulm from 1971-1981.



In 1981 Monica moved to Albany where she continued to work in religious education while pursuing a Master's Degree in Theology from St. John's University. Diabetes led her to home health care, then heart disease led to her retirement. She continued to be active in the life of the community. She was a member of the Brown County Historical Society and wrote a number of articles on the history of Brown County. Monica's spiritual journey never ended. In the fall of 2012, Monica became an oblate of St. Benedict and she never stopped serving her neighbor and her God.

**Edward P. Hudoba**, 98, died on February 26, 2013 at St.



Therese Home in New Hope, Minnesota. After training in sheet metal work at Dunwoody Institute, Ed served in the U.S.Navy-Seabees in WWII and then became business agent for Sheet Metal Workers Local #34 and continued in that position for 30 years. Married to Julie for 55 years, Ed

was a longtime, active member of the Knights of Columbus and an oblate of St. John's Abbey since 1954.

**Carl Stanley Rose**, 69, an oblate of St. John's since



1991, died on February 19, 2013. He was a member of Holy Ghost Catholic Church in Knoxville, Tennessee, and it was there that he made his final oblation in 1991. His pastor, Monsignor Francis Xavier Mankel, always referred to him as "Brother Carl." As a US Army and National Guard veteran, Carl served as a medical supply sergeant and

staff sergeant. He graduated from quarter master school in Fort Lee, Virginia. He is survived by several cousins and many friends.

**Andrew James Ver Haag**, 27, of Green Bay, died unexpectedly on April 14, 2013. He was the nephew of Oblate Pat DeGroot, also of Green Bay. Certified as an EMT, he was a joyful soul who appreciated a life of service and an ideal of encouraging personal growth in those around him. Andrew wrote poetry and enjoyed collectors' currency, lighters, swords, dragons and movies. He could quote any movie



word for word after one viewing. Andrew saw himself as a person of persistence, gratitude, gentleness, kindness, and a help to others.



**Jerome F. Bechtold**, 86, of Rockville, MN died on May 16, 2013 in an automobile crash. He served in the U.S. Army during World War II, and, after returning, married LeMay Wagner in 1948. They were blessed with eleven children. Jerry farmed near Rockville and was active in conservation work and local politics his whole life. He was on the Stearns County Soil and Water Conservation District since 1957,

was a member of the Rockville Township planning commission, was active in the National Catholic Rural Life Conference, and with LeMay, co-chaired the St. Cloud Diocesan Rural Life Committee.

**Philip H. Des Marais, Obl.S.B., 91**, died on May 19 in Sarasota, Florida, just ten days before his 92nd birthday. Philip was a TEC 5 in the US Army and served in World War II. (No photo available)

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### Deceased Monks of Saint John's Abbey

- + Brother Gregory Eibensteiner, 79, April 11, 2013
- + Father Kevin Seasoltz, 82, April 27, 2013
- + Father George Wolf, 97, May 20, 2013

#### *"In Paradisum"*

May angels lead you into paradise; upon your arrival, may the martyrs receive you and lead you to the holy city of Jerusalem.

May the ranks of angels receive you, and with Lazarus, once a poor man, may you have eternal rest.

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# News of and from Oblates

## Oblate Easter in Malaysia

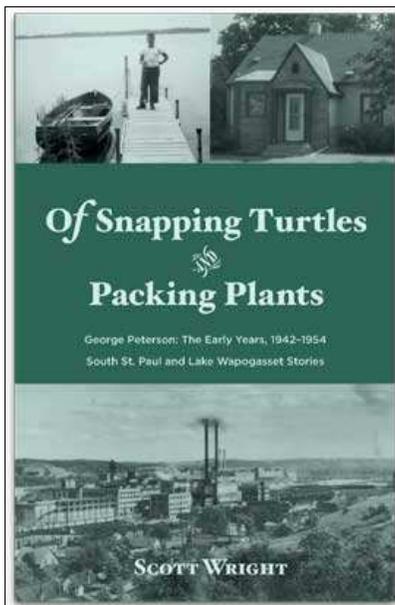
**Elizabeth Liew, Obl.S.B.**, writes of her Easter experience in Malaysia. "I have not seen such a huge crowd for the Easter Triduum until this year. I was in awe. For Holy Thursday, Good Friday and the Vigil on Saturday there were literally thousands of people. I went to church two hours before the service so that I could find a parking bay for my car. The cathedral was jam packed. My guess is that there were about 5000 people. It was a good Easter and I am indeed very happy that I was well prepared and able to help out as a Eucharistic Minister. Thirty-five of us each had a large ciborium that was filled to the brim, and at the end of it there was not a single host left. Previously I went to smaller churches in Brunei and had not experienced having to deal with such a huge crowd. As an EMC I am in the midst of everything that takes place. Archbishop John Wong, who presided at my final oblation last year, presided at all the Masses and the Good Friday services (in English and Malay). Thanks to oblate Bob Kirkley I also appreciated the homilies of Abbot John at Saint John's. They are so different from the ones given by the priests here. Very inspiring."

## Benedictine Influence at Prep School

**Father Tim Backous, O.S.B.**, who has been Headmaster at the Prep School for the past nine years, shares a bit of inspiration: "Yesterday I walked into the main office to find our Assistant Principal, Paul Menard, reading from the *Rule of Benedict* on the importance of not being tardy for the work of God. His audience was an 11<sup>th</sup> grade boy who has been late for school too many times this past month. For detention, Mr. Menard reads them a part of the *Rule* and they write a response, reflecting on their behavior. Mr. Menard's growing concern is that there are more repeat offenders than usual because they actually ENJOY their discussions with him about the *Rule*."

## Oblate Author

**Scott Wright, Obl.S.B.**, announces the publication of his new book, *Of Snapping Turtles and Packing Plants*. The work, which combines history, fiction and memoir, is based on Scott's experiences growing up in South St. Paul, MN during the 1940s and early 1950s.



Chad Roberts, Executive Director of the Dakota County Historical Society says that the book "is a fun, engaging, and at times bittersweet exploration of childhood. The recollections of Wright are wonderfully relatable, bringing to mind long-forgotten episodes from my own youth. A good read that will draw you in and spur your own sense of nostalgia."

More information is available on Scott's website: [Scottwrightmindfulnesspress.com](http://Scottwrightmindfulnesspress.com)

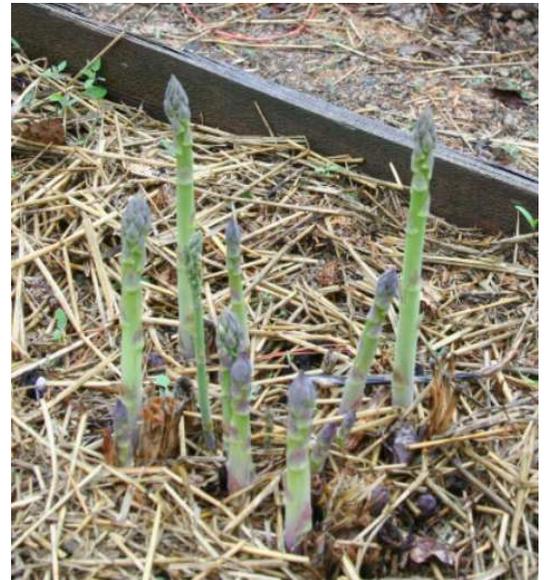
## Oblate Gardener/Chef

**Susan Sink, Obl.S.B.**, writes a regular blog: [Susansink.wordpress.com](http://Susansink.wordpress.com). Here is her May 17 post.



Three years ago, I had a dream. A dream to eat asparagus from my garden. I obsessively watched Youtube videos, ordered some plants and put them in two of my raised beds.

And for that year and the next, I just watched it grow. Each year, more stalks, and last year looking quite edible. But I held off to let all the nutrients go into the roots and enhance the plant.



Two days ago, I returned to Youtube and typed in "asparagus harvest." There was only one video, suggesting that basically you just pick it and eat it! The video I did find showed a woman twisting off the stalks by hand and recommended harvesting when the stalks are 6-9 inches high. It also recommended harvesting in the morning, putting the stalks in cold water, then in a bag in the fridge.

I went out yesterday morning and plucked a nice long stalk. And then, I ate it. Raw. It was very tender and very flavorful. It did not need cooking at all.

## Candidate Reflections

As part of their initial formation, oblate candidates are asked to read and reflect on a number of short essays related to Benedictine spirituality. Here are two recent submissions by candidates who are ready for final oblation.

**Pauline Zorza** writes the following reflection in response to the meditation on work according to Saint Benedict. (No photo available at this time).

For me, the Benedictine perspective has begun to seep in and infiltrate everything I am involved in...the entire day... especially my ministry. Like Martha at the end of the poem, I see my meticulousness or my seeking and striving for perfection become now a gesture of love because I pray now in thanksgiving for all that enhances my life and living, but more importantly as an offering to God and for what my work may bring or give to others. When I think of it — whatever I do—as a gift to God and his people and creation, it takes me to a different level, no longer like Martha's worrisome or anxious level. Instead, I find the joy to give back to God, give back to the flock, give back to the world, in general. When I retired from teaching, I told God one afternoon at adoration, that I “owed him big time” for the countless blessings and gifts and that my retirement would now be totally his. And at that point, nothing remained the same.

So all the smallest things become a message to God in prayer...to find him in the moment even if it is just a small, menial task.

Work is indeed part of creation. People often must feel a part of this in planting and gardening and raising crops. But, it seems to me that we are a part of “creation” in many facets of life. We are creating a healthy, warm and comfortable home for our families in meals we prepare or cleaning we may do. And even from writing a letter, story or poem to developing works of art, although we call these “creative” works, nonetheless, what is produced stems from talents or God-given gifts.

Are people not using a charism when they provide shelters for humanity or out-reach programs for communities? This serves God's creatures and becomes part of the world in cultures and societies that are all God's creation. Certainly, those in research and fields of technological advancements have aided or drawn countless people together and worked in enhancing human life globally, hopefully to honor God. Unfortunately, not everything remains a productive, positive or integrity-based “work.”

However, as an oblate, I continue to ask myself: “Am I doing this in the way that illustrates it is being done first for the glory of God? Is my attitude one that I would never be ashamed of in God's eyes and in those of all the people God has placed in my life?”

**Dr. Timothy Beddow, M.D.**, practices and teaches pathology at MetroHealth Medical Center, Case Western Reserve University, School of Medicine, Cleveland, OH.

*The Rule of Saint Benedict* describes the tools for good works, including “Listen readily to holy reading, and devote yourself often to prayer” (4:55-56).

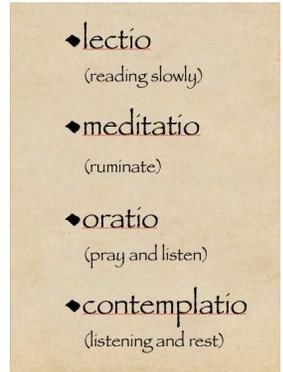
Benedict says that we are to use the tools without ceasing day and night, to toil faithfully at all these tasks, in his monks' lives within the enclosure of the monastery, but for myself, within my community and to the ability I can in my way of life.

By praying, the human speaks to God, and with reading, God speaks to the human. Holy reading is an act of faith, reading done peacefully, slowly, hopefully allowing the reader to actually experience the presence of God. What an aspiration! Can this work? In my experience, not always. I have been surprised, though.

The method of *lectio* involves approximately four “steps.” Virtually all writers caution that the steps are not discrete and discontinuous, but rather overlap each other, melding into one another. Reading, reflection/meditation, praying, and finally contemplation. Recursive activity happens when following this route. Reading slowly, sometimes very, very slowly, maybe a word or a phrase, stopping to “imagine” or reflect, then a simple earnest prayer, perhaps then more reading and reflection, again a prayer, and finally, sometimes but not always, a state of awe or contemplation may occur. This, I find, involves my whole being, and when I experience this, I get both scared and satisfied.

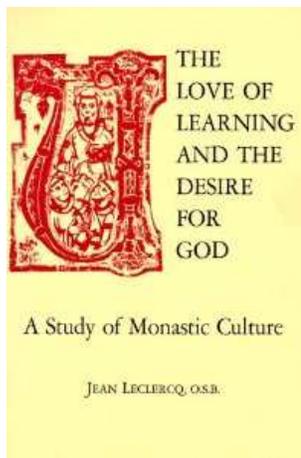
I find that *lectio* is perhaps the single most satisfying “religious” activity I do. I seek my *lectio divina* at night, not too late, but while I am still awake and able to think. I try not to pray this way during the daytime hours, as the experience usually leaves me pleasantly “exhausted” and in a frame of mind that is hard to shed in order to “get back to work.”

*Lectio*, then, for me does involve my whole being. It is terrifically important to my life, and I would say that *lectio divina* may be the aspect of my being that most nearly completes my approaching the *conversatio morum* that I long to attain. When on those few precious occurrences that I feel I have actually experienced God's presence in the very center of my being, “in the cave of the heart,” I sense awe and tremble actually with a bit of fear. Maybe it's best that this degree of “success” in my *lectio* come only infrequently to me.



## The Tyranny of Things and The Freedom of Less

In 1961 Dom Jean Leclercq penned what has since become a foundational text on monastic culture. A monk of the Benedictine abbey of Clervaux in Luxembourg, his *Love of Learning and the Desire for God* delivered exactly what the title promised, and it did so in beautiful prose. So loving was his study, that it crossed the threshold from



scholarship, to become spiritual reading. It has since become far more than just another book about the learned monk and nun of history.

Books have been essential to monastic life, and there's no denying that monks and nuns have had a great fondness for them through the centuries. In the popular imagination they sat at their desks, first copying and

then reading the books they'd crafted. In the course of centuries they amassed the greatest libraries of their time, and small wonder that we gaze in awe at their work. Manuscripts like the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels still stir the imagination. Likely, they always will. ...

Saint John Cassian wrote about "thoughts of things" -- or better still, the "thoughts about the acquisition of things" -- as one of the great distractions for everyone. After food and sex, it ranked third on his ascending scale of "most frequent of day-dreams." It should surprise no one that people in monasteries share the same sorts of thoughts as everyone else. After all, despite what some may think, monks and nuns are people too.

The tyranny of "things over people" has always been with us, but the struggle is especially intense for members of a consumer society. When we define ourselves as economic units of consumption, then the amount we own is the measure of our greatness. I gladly join with those who note we must consume things in order to live and thrive. But when we value human beings in terms of what they own, or how much they buy, then we have gone into alien territory. I would argue that you and I are far more important than the stuff we have stashed away in cupboards and garages and banks. All those things have some value, but if they are what make us important, then life is not worth living.

And that brings me to the issue of books. Given Saint

Benedict's caution about private ownership, you'd naturally assume that the library would eliminate the need for private books. You'd be wrong. For all sorts of very good reasons, monks have owned books, and they still do. And I'm one of them. But like anything else, too much of a good thing can come back to haunt you. Just ask the monks who have lived in cells where the books became the monsters that took over their lives.

I speak from personal experience when it comes to owning too many books. Through years of schooling and teaching, I amassed a respectable collection; but the books finally began to assert themselves as master. Then one day I awoke to the need to fight back. I had lugged some of those books around for years, from one office and room to the next. A few I had not touched since college. Some were still boxed up from graduate school. And each and every one of them had a counterpart in the library, three hundred yards away. In a moment of insight, I realized I had no choice but to choose. It was them or me, and one of us would have to cave in. It was no longer a case of "love of learning." It had become a tyranny of things over my life.

Most of us won't ever have the problem that comes from owning too many luxurious boats, cars, and condos —and the things that fill them. But we all have "thoughts of things" that run through our minds. Some things are fun and frivolous; some are concessions to our place in a consumer society; and some are anxieties about our material future. All are worth thinking about, but none are so important that we should allow them to take over our lives.

As for *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, that's one book I intend to keep. It's a reminder of what life in the monastery can be like. I need to let that thought run through my mind a little more often than it has in the past.



Eric Hollas, O.S.B., writes his weekly blog at: <http://monkschronicle.wordpress.com/>. Father Eric was instrumental in initiating *The Saint John's Bible*. His work as Senior Associate for Arts & Cultural Affairs at Saint John's University requires a good deal of travel, and we appreciate how he generously shares his views and insights.

Editor

## Book Review by Pamela Keul, Oblate Candidate

*How To Be a Monastic and Not Leave Your Day Job; An Invitation to Oblate Life.* Benet Tvedten, O.S.B. (Paraclete Press, 2006).

My favorite definition of education is that it's "learning what you didn't even know you didn't know." That was true for me when I read Brother Benet Tvedten's little book, *How To Be a Monastic and Not Leave Your Day Job: An Invitation to Oblate Life*. I say "little" because this book is an easy pleasure to read; you won't need to leave your day job to take off reading it and then finish it, but it's rich with guideposts and inspiration.

I'm at the stage in my monastic education of looking for experience, strength, and hope, and I expect that to continue. Oh boy and girl, Brother Benet has experience, not to mention strength and hope. In 2006 when this book was published, he had held the position of director of oblates at Blue Cloud Abbey near Marvin, South Dakota, for nearly thirty years. From what I can tell, he truly loves oblates. In this book he didn't actually use the love word to describe how he feels about them but he did say, "Oblates are my kind of people!" I felt celebrated, welcomed, encouraged and fortified – loved and appreciated – as I read *How To Be a Monastic and Not Leave Your Day Job*.

Brother Benet offers "how to" specifics for oblate life. He also discusses why a person might be attracted to the monastery in the first place, including results of a survey done by Father Edward Vebelun, O.S.B., a monk of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota. Father Vebelun heard from forty-five men and women oblate directors who reported some common reasons why lay persons are drawn to a monastic community. First, support from vowed Benedictines; monks pray for oblates! If that weren't enough, they aren't stingy about sharing their Benedictine values and structured prayer life. They feed oblates in a variety of ways. Becoming affiliated with a Benedictine monastery is an opportunity for new spiritual life and growth.

Obedience, conformity, humility, patience and grumbling are some of the behaviors discussed in *How to be a Monastic*. In a concluding chapter entitled "Five Simple Guidelines for Oblates," the author lists "practices that clearly identify someone as Benedictine." For these he gives credit to a group of oblate directors who created them, identified them, in 1971.

If you want to stay where you are in terms of spiritual and personal growth, forget being a Benedictine. "Oblates strive for their own continued Christian renewal and improvement. This is what Benedict calls conversion of life – *conversatio*," explains Brother Benet. Oblates exercise "practical spirituality." "They combine prayer and work by living and working in the presence of God...." The oblate directors who wrote these guidelines for oblates particular-

ly cited virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and tolerance, as well as a spirit of community. Their inclusion of these fine qualities reminds me that as an oblate I will never lack challenges and joys in monastic life.

Brother Benet writes of oblates being valued members of the Benedictine community. Father Bede Classick, O.S.B., former coordinator of the North American Association of Oblate Directors, says: "Oblates are monasticism's gift to the world. . . . The oblate stands between monasticism and the world as a mediator, linking the two, drawing them together, bringing to the world the values which monasticism hold up as important for the Christian way of life."

Brother Benet makes it clear that vowed monastics are not just doing oblates a favor by offering them a piece of the Benedictine action. Members of the two groups are teammates, a community, a family.

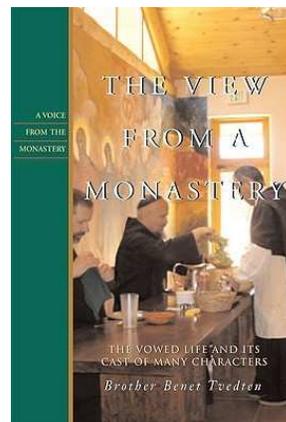
Oblates illuminate and disseminate Benedictine spirituality out in the world like honeybees pollenate flowers. In response to this great opportunity they have been given to learn to live their calling, how can oblates resist praying for those who live in monasteries and for the good work that goes on in them?

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### Also by Brother Benet:

#### ***The View from a Monastery.***

Benet demythologizes monastic life, mentioning his own misconceptions about the cloister when he decided to become a monk. Readers who imagine that monks are either prudish and uptight or walking on clouds of mystic holiness will discover their mistake when they read these stories. The monks he introduces are ordinary people, with the same occurrence of eccentrics as in the general population (which is to say, plenty). Many of his anecdotes are humorous; he is a James Herriot of Benedictines, showing the same affection for his life and the people in it while appreciating the funny side.

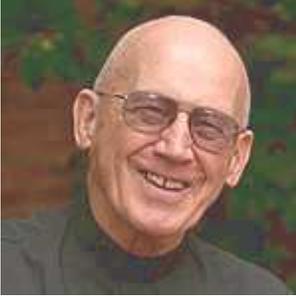


***The Motley Crew: Monastic Lives.*** In this collection of portraits and reflections on the monastic life, Brother Benet has gathered together a motley crew indeed. Inside this book you'll encounter the stories, both legend and history, of ancestors and contemporary monastics, the saints and the laypeople who contributed to this movement over the centuries: Maurus jumps into the lake. Scholastica prays up a storm to keep her brother by her side. Monks venture forth to serve as missionaries in the American wilderness, always with Saint Benedict as their guide.

## For Spiritual Enrichment—Some Samplings

Summer is for many a time for more reading. In the matter of spiritual reading, as in many other matters, it is “different strokes for different folks.” What follows are some resources for daily *lectio* and prayer.

**Father Don Talafous, O.S.B.**, monk of Saint John’s, posts a daily reflection on the abbey website. A sample:



“I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise always on my lips” (Ps (33) 34:1). The devout couple who just came back from a pilgrimage only to discover within a week or two that their twenty-year old son had a malignant tumor could be excused for having trouble

with that line. And the mother, the more vocal of the two, did any number of times ask why and express her impatient disappointment with God. Dad quietly sat alongside her, held her and tried to comfort her. The psalm goes on to say that the Lord sets him free from all his terrors, rescues the poor and the distressed; those who revere the Lord lack nothing, their appeals are heard. “They are happy who seek refuge in him.” The couple mentioned above and their son can be forgiven for having trouble with these sentiments.

Most of us will in some way or on some day be in similar straits. How can or will we bless or praise the Lord at such times? Many of the Biblical writers before Christ expected that vindication and rescue would be sure here and now for those who trusted in God. We can share their joyful trust if we allow that our favorable response from the Lord might 1) come otherwise than we expect or 2) beyond this life.

The experience of the saints -- and among them are many of our family members and friends -- is the surest warranty we have for believing that trust in God is never misplaced. These are people who have learned by prolonged trust even amid terrors and distress that the Lord hears and cares. Therefore, “I will bless the Lord at all times, His praise always on my lips.”

Just click: <http://www.saintjohnsabbey.org/reflection/>

Or on the abbey homepage at the top under “prayers and worship,” the first item is “daily reflection.”

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**Brother Jerome Leo, O.S.B.** monk of Saint Mary’s Monastery in Petersham, Massachusetts, writes a reflection/commentary on the portion of the *Rule* designated for the day. For example, the selection for January 23, May 24, September 23 is Chapter 5: On Obedience. What follows above are excerpts from Brother Jerome’s reflection:

It is our hearts that convict us in obedience. Not because of feelings or emotions, those can be mistaken, but because of the relationship between love and will. Many of us have loved someone and hated having to do something that the love required, but we did it anyway. Our feelings or repugnance were over-ruled by the will in our hearts to love. Face it, love does not always feel too good, which is a principal way it differs from mere feelings.

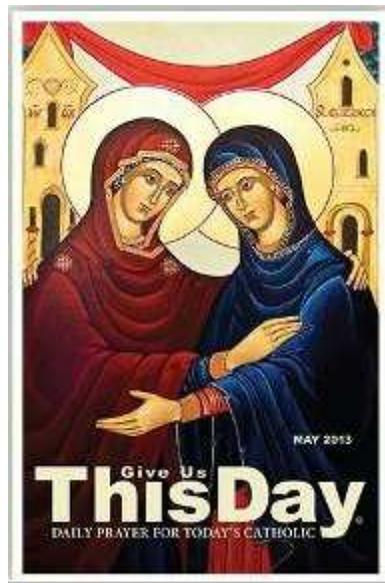
Jean Ronan, one of my favorite teachers, used to tell me to always make all decisions “in the light of the death candle,” that is, as if one were about to die. How hearing that annoyed me at 30, but how true it is, and the closer one gets to the possibility of that death candle, the truer it is. There’s a handy rule of thumb here. Does our choice put God and our faith first, no matter what? If it does not, something is terribly wrong. ...

There is also the trust of faith involved here. God is God and we must firmly believe he will do the best for us, no matter how unclear that may sometimes be. ... We have been too ready to think that obedience depends only on humans, who are flawed. It doesn’t. All obedience is given to God. Our love and trust and his love and mercy are the deciding factors, not the universally flawed human weakness that plagues every human means of God’s will in this world.

To subscribe to this group, send a blank email to:

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# Oblate

MONTHLY  
CONNECTION

ST JOHN'S ABBEY  
MAY 2013



The cenobites - those who belong to a monastery.

## ***Rule of Saint Benedict: Chapter 1, The Kinds of Monks***

We want to offer you this new publication, *Oblate Monthly Connection*, as a way to connect with our oblates on a more regular basis. This publication will be available each month either within *The Oblate* or sent as a separate mailing. Please let us know what you think of this publication. Thanks.

First, a story. I sat there listening deeply as the old monk answered our questions. Though I am usually shy, I felt so comfortable in his presence that I found myself raising my hand. "Brother, could you tell us something about yourself?" He leaned back. "Myself?" he mused. "My name used to be me. But now it is we."

Chapter one of the *Rule of Benedict* is the end product of a long and rich literary tradition which tries to distinguish the genuine from the false way

monasticism is lived. Having committed to a particular community, a Benedictine has a stake at keeping one's own life and community focused on what we are meant to be about. The oblate life, firmly rooted in the Benedictine tradition, emphasizes: The Liturgy of the Hours, lectio divina, private prayer and work. Oblate life also means being present and helpful to our brothers and sisters in need and being hospitable to all those we meet in our daily life. As Benedictines, we belong to one another like buds on a tree.

Benedict writes, "clearly there are four types of monks." Benedict seems to say that it is obvious to tell the types apart. We might think that we fit in comfortably as a person dedicated to community life -- a cenobite. A thought -- perhaps these four different types of monks are living within us at the same time? For example, there are times when

the hermit needs to appear. We all need personal space now and then. There is also in us the sarabaiter that wants to live by our own rules. Yet the positive side of being a sarabaiter is that we might be called to bring about change in a community in a rut. There is the gyrovague in us too. Do we sometimes think that happiness is to be found somewhere other than my own community? Do we constantly wander around? Then again, we might need to be away from the community for a time when we can reassess our commitments. The saying goes, "Not all who wander are lost."

Unless we learn to live with ourselves we cannot live with others. But equally, unless and until we have learnt to live fully and creatively with others we cannot hope to live with our own selves.

Fr. Michael Peterson, OSB  
Assistant Oblate Director

### **Oblate Candidate Reflection**

The *Rule* addresses our yearnings for unity with God and our requirements for growth and purpose and significance, to be part of what is bigger than ourselves. ~ Pamela Keul

# The Oblate

THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD MAY BE GLORIFIED

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## Mark Your Calendars

July 12-14—Annual Retreat

August—Oblate Office Closed

September—Local Chapters  
resume

November 17—Fall/Advent Day  
of Reflection

December 25—Merry Christmas

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