

The Oblate

THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD MAY BE GLORIFIED

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

Summer 2011

Volume 55, Number 3

Address Correction Requested

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COLLEGEVILLE, MN 56321

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Special points of interest:

- Please remember the coming Oblate Retreat July 8-10, with the optional tour of the Pottery Studio with Richard Bresnahan, Friday the 8th, 3 pm. Some travel money is available. Contact Fr. Michael Kwatera, OSB, 320-368-2018 (office) 3568 (residence) for info.

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The Oblate's Prayer

At the last Oblate Advisory Committee meeting, a question was raised about the origin of the excellent prayer we use at our sessions. Ron Joki, ObISB, researched it and here is the prayer and also its original:

O Loving God, I ask your blessing this day on all the Oblates of Saint Benedict and those with whom we are affiliated. Help us to become people of prayer and peace. Though scattered far and wide, help us to be together in the spirit of your love. Give us hearts wide enough to

embrace each other as well as those lives we touch. Enable us to listen and to learn from each other and those around us each day. May we be models in our homes, neighborhoods, and communities of wise stewardship, dignified human labor, sacred leisure, and reverence for all living things. Above all, O God, may our presence among others be a constant witness of justice, compassion, and hope to all. Amen.

From Alliance for International Monasticism,

adapted by Sue Walkoviak, Oblate of Saint Scholastica Monastery, Duluth Minnesota.

Here is the original prayer:

O loving God, we ask your blessing, on all monastic men and women, especially those who live and work in the most destitute parts of the world.

Help us to become people of prayer and peace. May we be visible signs that strangers can live together in God's love. Give us hearts wide (Continued, Page 4)

God's Call to Serve in Prayer and Action...Ron Joki, ObISB

From the Oblate Day of Recollection at Saint John's Abbey, March 20, 2011.

When Director of Oblates, Fr. Michael Kwatera, OSB, invited me to offer my thoughts at the Lenten day of rec-

ollection, I said "yes" without really knowing what I would say. I knew that God had been inspiring our Saint John's Oblate meetings at Saint Joan of Arc Church with an exciting spirit of new possibilities, and I felt

enthused about sharing some of the richness and positive energy of our hopes and dreams. I began using two quotes to guide me on the journey from that point to the day of the gathering. (Continued, Page 5)

Spring Oblate Meetings at Joan of Arc, Mpls

By Ron Joki

In the last months the Saint John's Oblate meetings at Saint Joan's have been dealing with emotional and spiritual issues which could be important for any one of us as we reach out in service according to God's call.

In March we explored the challenges of being in solidarity with those who may be difficult to love and serve. They may be those living on the edge of soci-

ety or those whose life-style choices, politics or theology don't agree with ours. Our meeting began with a guided meditation on loving kindness during which we identified a person who for us has evoked pain, anger or disdain. Some of us chose public figures or stereotypical persons while others picked someone who we knew personally. For a few minutes we asked God's help in seeing this person with the eyes of

our heart, informed by the heart of Jesus. After the meditation the ensuing discussion further helped us to understand the many facets of this issue and to ask God's strength in dealing with them.

The April gathering focused on those times when things fall apart, not only from the perspective of coping mechanisms, but also seeing burnout as an opportunity to be open to God directing us to different (Continued, Page 7)

"To live ready" could mean to prefer Christ to all things, to have a healthy detachment from things of this world and to live in everyday forgiveness.

A Relevant Rule.....by Peggy Stokman, OblSB

To keep death before one's eyes daily is one of the 72 Instruments of Good Works in Chapter 4 of the Rule. Neither Father Benedict nor the Benedictine authors I own explain this counter-cultural instruction. I've paraphrased it for myself—"to live ready".

Spiritually "to live ready" could mean to prefer Christ to all things, to have a healthy detachment from things of this world and to live in everyday forgiveness.

Practically "to live ready" could mean discussing your health directive and funeral plans with family,

to be organized in your business details and to simplify your life.

Listen to Benedict's wisdom for your life.

The Oblate Historian: Patricia Jones, OblSB

The idea of an Oblate historian came up at the Advisory Committee meeting following the Advent day of recollection. In consenting to accept this role, I realize that it can be a daunting task. At the same time, it will be rewarding and hopefully of great value and interest to current and future Oblates.

How did the program begin? When did it began and by whom? Why did lay people recognize the need for a program? These will be the beginning questions that I will begin to research in the coming issues.

Right now I am currently in the process of moving from my lake home of the past 15 years. Research

time is challenged and my books that might contain valuable information are packed away. I will check out the archives at St. John's and welcome any input or leads that any of you might wish to offer. I look forward to the task at hand. Look for more to come in future issues of The Oblate. (Continued, Page 4)

war, national despair, poverty, neglect, violence, insensitivity, hard heartedness, injustices of all kinds roam the world.

One truth I have found for myself is that the psalms will always remain obtuse, obscure, and strange unless I read them regularly and repeatedly. Reading them according to the monastic schedules, in the knowledge that others are praying them at the same time, has helped me overcome my initial resistance and over time discover the beauty and unique spirit in each one of the 150.

But no habitual recitation of a set number of psalms will ever be sufficient. "Pause a while and know that I am God," says the psalmist. This line, which is also from Psalm 46, reminds us that without the "pausing a while" we will be unable to fully receive or digest their essential messages and apply them to our individual realities. How to slow down (especially for us moderns) is the dilemma? Here are some suggestions,

- Choose one potent line as a mantra for the day, write it down, and take it with you as you go about your day,.
- Select a psalm and go through the Lectio process with it.
- Use the Jesuit method of imagining yourself square in the middle of the muddle.
- Bring into your reading the current issues of the communities large and small, near and far, strange and familiar to which all of us belong as members of the human race.
- If you are in the middle of reading the psalms for one of the Hours, and are arrested by a word, line, or image, stop and savor it rather than moving on through the entire psalmody.

- Bring some of these suggestions to your prayer group if you have the good fortune to belong to one.

With these and other approaches to reading the psalms what at first may seem exotic, archaic, and for removed from our personal life experiences will become familiar, comforting, instructive, and increasingly relevant. We will go to the psalms as if we were going to take a walk in a beautiful, a well-known garden, one that is always in bloom. It just takes time.

The Local Collegeville Group and Summer Reminder

All who have attended the St. John's Abbey events, especially the summer retreats, can testify to the natural splendor, prayer-filled context, hospitable communality, and thoughtful relationships and discussion available. Those wishing to attend please register or indicate attendance via e-mail to Lucie Johnson at lohuc@hotmail.com or use the director's numbers on this edition's first page. This is just a reminder for the July 8-10 retreat, as the brochure already has been sent out.

Book Review by Chuck Seashore, OblSB continued

To pick up our pieces, dry our tears, shake ourselves down, and continue the journey with renewed hope and joy. "Alleluia indeed"!

I found this book to be one which required thoughtful and careful reading in order to understand the many faces of life and that in all scenarios, God always finds a path for our faith to express itself.

only a line or two speak to me before the psalmist's mood (or mine) shifts, leaving me out in left field.

We can overcome this resistance by employing what Edward Oakes ("The Psalms as Christian Prayer," *America*, 3/14/1992) calls "the corporate act of worship." Thus, even if we are unable at the moment to identify with the emotional content of any given psalm, we can recite it in a spirit of solidarity with some other human being who is experiencing pain or joy or anger, or uninhibited praise. For inspiration, all we need to do is read the local paper, listen to or watch the national and international news, considered the lives of our families, friends, co-workers and those who sit beside us in church.

While this reading as corporate prayer is powerful, and true, the approach which brings the psalms closest to home for me is rooted in Jungian depth psychology. Thus, we "read" a psalm as we would read a dream or fairy tale, a novel or film, a work of art or piece of music ever on the lookout for something that reaches into the depth of being and causes us to "catch fire." This spark, I believe, is a point of entry into the core of our true God-created "Selves" (as opposed to our ego-driven small "s" selves, as Merton so often reminds us). That essence, that True Self, although obscured and distorted over time, is still there to be unveiled and empowered.

Take Psalm 57, for instance, as an "instruction of the night." The psalmist laments, using the following images: destroying storm, harrying people, lions greedy for human prey, a net strategically laid, a pitfall. But God is also present in the midst of this confusion and terror: the shadow of your wings, faithfulness, love as high as Heaven, glory over all the earth. In this knowledge, the psalmist's spirits rise: my

heart is ready' I mean to sing and play for you; awake, my muse; I mean to thank you among the peoples. Consider oneself as the protagonist in this rich story and claim it as your own. This is your trouble, your ever-attentive God, your jubilation and rejuvenation.

Psalm 139 is another beautiful personal message from God. It opens with an acknowledgment of the Divine Attention: "You examine me and know me; you know if I am sitting or standing." It ends by acknowledging that such constancy carries an expectation: "Guide me in the way that is everlasting." Is this not the perfect life? A person is intimately and unconditionally loved and is empowered by that love to reach her full potential and become a force for good in the world.

Psalm 107 takes us on a wild ride through the hazards of risky living. Who of us at one time or another has not been "lost in the wilds and the desert," "living in gloom and darkness," "staggering and reeling like drunkards, their seamanship adrift," thirsting in "a fertile country turned into salt flats?" It takes only a little imagination to replace this imagery with real life experiences. And to reflect on how one was "directed to an inhabited town," "snatched from the Pit," taken "safe to the port," or delivered unexpectedly to a "spring of water in arid ground."

In real time, of course, actual active-in-the-world enemies do exist. On the day after September 11, 2001, I read these lines in Psalm 46: "we shall not be afraid when the earth gives way, when mountains tremble into the depths of the sea"; "God is inside the city; she can never fall"; "all over the world he puts an end to wars," words spoken to my heart, to the hearts of the world. Enemies abound: real people, yes, but also hopelessness, despotism,

The Psalms: One Oblate's Reflections, Jean Sheridan, ObISB

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As every good Benedictine Oblate knows, the psalms are the ground upon which the entire way of life we aspire to rests. To the modern reader, however, these ancient poems and songs can seem strange, emotionally supercharged, and seriously at odds with our Christ-centered way of

looking at the world. Consequently, we may struggle to be present as we read, and distracted by the "sour notes" that pop up with irritating frequency. How then to broach these barriers and find ways to unlock the universal messages they hold?

First, let us look at the LITURGY OF THE HOURS (also known as the Divine Office) with which we are all familiar. Rooted in ancient temple

and synagogue worship, it is practiced today primarily in monasteries, where, every week, the entire lexicon of 150 psalms is chanted in community, or read in solitude. The Abbot of the Genesee near Rochester, NY has explained the arrangement of the Divine Office on their web site. The following is a synthesis of that explanation,

(Continued on Page 8)

THE LOCAL COLLEGEVILLE GROUP: ALSO SUMMER REMINDER

The April meeting of the local group was very interesting and beneficial. Steve Pavkovich, ObISB gave a very insightful testimonial to his origin and development as an Oblate. Also the setting was beautiful, in the Abbey Guest house overlooking the Sagatagan. There was dark ice on the lake with a

warm southerly wind causing clumps and wisps of fog to rise up like geysers, drifting south like fairly thick clouds hitting the building. Benedictine hospitality was shown by the very good food available to quite a few guests as well as those Oblates attending (Continued on Page 11)

Book Review by Chuck Seashore, ObISB

Book Title: "Uncommon Gratitude, Alleluia for All That Is" Authors: Joan Chittister, OSB and Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury
This is a remarkable book published by the Liturgical Press and written by two of the most prolific authors in the Christian faith during our age. In this book the authors offer us a

broad range of things and circumstances to be grateful for. These things provide us with opportunity to sing "alleluia", thanks and praise to God. Some are things we are naturally grateful for: God, peace, wealth, life, faith and unity. But when these are set alongside other diverse things as death, divisions, suffering and even sin-

ners, we begin to see that life itself is an exercise in learning to sing "alleluia" here in order to recognize the face of God hidden in the recesses of time, a faith-filled and prophetic perspective on the dark and hurting spaces in our world and lives. We are both invited and challenged (Continued Page 11)

"The psalms are the ground upon which the entire way of life we aspire to rests."

The Psalms: One Oblates Reflections by Joan Sheridan, ObISB Continued

The psalms selected for each Hour reflect an intention to match them with the ups and downs of an ordinary day (indeed with the entire human life cycle). Those chosen for the predawn hour of Vigils, for instance, evoke the experience of hopeful waiting in darkness and uncertainly as the arrival of the archetypal bridegroom is anticipated. Lauds, at daybreak, celebrates the rising of the sun, symbolizing the arrival of Jesus, the Son of God. In keeping with the promise of this wonderful event, these psalms, in dramatic contrast to those of Vigils, are laudatory and filled with youthful joy and energy. We are awake now, refreshed from sleep, ready to go. At the midmorning hour of Terce, the Holy Spirit, who, according to tradition, descended on the apostles at this time of day, is called on to invigorate the day's work. The psalms of Sext are dedicated to Christ crucified, an event which, also according to tradition, occurred midday. The request is for perseverance in the midst the daily grind. As the sun rides low in the sky and spirits flag, the psalms of the hour of None voice a request for assistance as one strives to find renewed energy to face the relentless demands of life. The psalms of Vespers at day's end honor the work of the passing day, acknowledge its successes, failures, and ongoing struggles, mark surcease from toil, give thanks, and anticipate a welcomed rest. To balance the inevitable awareness that sleep is closely akin to death, psalms of confidence and trust are prayed at the hour of Compline. This final hour of the day has been called a "daily exercise in the art of dying into the fullness of light and eternal life. It ends as Vigils began, in the dark. And then the cycle begins anew.

The intimacy with ordinary human life that this cyclic reading of the psalms mirrors points to their continuing relevance and fills the heart with gratitude to the psalmists who composed them. Still, problems remain and dissonant notes blur or bury the underlying messages, preventing us from a full appreciation and comprehension of them.

Writers have wrestled with this dilemma over the centuries, and numerous approaches are proposed. Gabriel Garonne (How to Pray the Psalms, Notre Dame, 1965) advises those who take them up to replace intellectual analysis and detached reflection with a simple heartfelt desire to meet God. He points out that they are first of all poetry and rich in imagery, sound, and rhythm, and thus best sung or recited aloud. Indeed, throughout the entire history of pre-Christian Jews the psalms were the "hymn book" for liturgical celebrations (A Hebrew word for the psalms is Tehillim, meaning hymn) and were accompanied on the psalterion, a stringed instrument. In this way they resemble bardic and epic poetry and the oral traditions of other cultures.

The problem for Christians, says Garonne, is how to accept the sentiments of vengeance, retribution, lament, woe and hopelessness of the psalms without compromising the very different spirit of the gospels. This we can do, he says, by being mindful as we recite them of the personal example and message of Christ and by being conscious of the reality that they represent a point in the evolution of religion and spirituality which was not yet gifted with revelation incarnated. What we need to do as we pray then is to "translate" the language of the psalms into the "language" of the gospels. Thus, their wisdom is projected onto the beatitudes, the proclamation of God onto the

God's Call to Serve in Prayer and Action...Continued by Ron Joki, ObISB

"You are with us, faithful God, revealing yourself in every experience of our lives." (from WORD OF GOD, BENEDICTINE PRAYER, ed. Judith Sutura, OSB, Lit. Press 1997)

"Prayer is not asking for what you think you want but asking to be changed in ways you can't imagine." (Kathleen Norris)

As I prayed, read, and listened to people, I found that words, images or stories would emerge that particularly spoke to me and inspired me. Perhaps the same happens to you, as it has often with me, that I have received such insights and inspirations and been energized, but in the course of my laziness or business I have not acted on them. However, anticipating this presentation, I began to write things down, occasionally sharing them with others, and eventually they came together into what I bring to you. I mention this because I think that this is how God often works in us, and if we are paying attention and trusting of God, the Spirit can bring life so much good and amazing work in the world through us.

I believe that God not only challenges us to be attentive to the divine being revealed in our every lived experience, but to use these insights in a way that we can identify as "lectio on life", the prayerful reflection of "reading" of events of our life, something like the prayerful reading of scripture that we call lectio divina. I will say more about this a bit further in this presentation.

Our Oblate discussions at St. Joan's have been focusing on several questions.

1. How are we called to serve God and to discern God's will in our lives as

Benedictine Oblates, both in prayer (communal and individual) and in action according to our God-given abilities and interests? How can we best live out our Oblation?

2. How can we show respect and gratitude for what God has given us through good stewardship or ourselves and our world and through compassionate sharing of these gifts?
3. How can we make an impact on the root causes of problems in the world?

In response to these questions, we began to look to some of the documents from the last World Congress of Oblates. (You can access them by computer at <http://www.benedictine-oblates.org/2009/testi-en.php>.) "The Religious Challenges of today—the Benedictine Answer, Personal Relations and Communion," by Mother Maire Hickey, OSB gave us some thoughts to ponder about how we can apply what we know from Saint Benedict about living in a religious community to our life in the world community.

Particularly we began to look at her reference to the Community of Sant'Egidio (www.santegidio.org) which began in Rome in 1968 at the initiative of a young man, Andrea Ricardi. He gathered a group of high school students like himself to listen to the voice of God and to put the Gospel message into practice. Today the Community is a movement of more than 50,000 lay people dedicated to evangelization and charity in more than 70 countries. Their examples of service

in prayer and action seemed to resonate well with who we are as Oblates and how we might begin to answer our questions. Also perhaps prophetically for us, we recalled that in 2007 Saint John's School of Theology & Seminary presented its annual Dignitas Humana Award to Marco Impagliazzo, international leader of the worldwide Community of Sant'Egidio. As God continues to invite us into participation, we may become more amazed at how coincidental events make sense in the grand plan.

While becoming inspired and at times passionate about God using us to be powerful and effective workers in the world, we Oblates recognized the primacy and necessity of listening to God at every step, of asking our questions and being attentive to answers in the context of prayer, for without our intentional connection to the Source, we know that we will lose our way. Prayer in its broadest sense is both a form of service, but also the essential fount of inspiration and energy that motivates us into action.

In my presentation at Saint John's I included a number of images representative of what might move and trouble us in the world. We need only watch the news or walk the streets to encounter our own set of such images if we aren't wearing blinders. If we use "lectio on life", we might ask these questions during our meditation:

What is touching me most profoundly right now?

As I prayerfully sit with the image or issue, what feelings are arising? I might prayerfully ask: "God, how are you speaking to me in this, and what are you calling me to do?" It may help to discern the source of the answer if it comes from a place of love.

Are we allowing fears, doubts or excuses to silence God's voice? What keeps us from acting on what we believe God is saying to us? I often find these words inspirational:

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, or fabulous?' Actually, who are you NOT to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others." (Marianne Williamson FROM A RETURN TO LOVE, REFLECTIONS ON THE PRINCIPLES OF A COURSE IN MIRACLES)

While this seems to fly in the face of our ideal of humility, true humility does

not attempt by ego assassination to squelch the power of God working through us. Think of some of our most beloved saints who let God's light shine brilliantly through them, even as they were beautiful examples of humility. In our tradition, Saint Benedict tells us, "Your way of acting should be different than the world's way. The love of Christ should come before all else." (RB 4:20) If we fulfill this, then the love of Christ compels us to love our neighbor AND ourselves. The perfect love of Christ casts out all fear including the fear of our being conduits of the tremendous power of the love of Jesus!

The words of this poem by Sr. Barbara Mayer, OSB give us some insight to how God accomplishes this in us:

Blessed with God
We have been mixed with divinity,
blended with the very substance of
God, stirred together so that a new
reality is created.
"It is no longer I who live but Christ lives
in me." Paul reminds us.
We are a new creation, exotic and
grace-filled, able to do what alone is not
possible, dough yeasted with God to
become the world's leaven, no longer
stiff and flat, but spreading and
stretching to reach every cranny, every
hole and filling it with divine presence.
This is our destiny. We cannot be
unblended.

For some of us, it is our nature to become enthused about many good and wonderful possibilities, and say yes very often, setting ourselves up for burnout, as was so wisely suggested in

a question from one of our Oblates who attended the day of recollection. However, burnout, as was shared by another Oblate, is sometimes OK. It's a way for us to have a reality check and to accept humbly our limitations. The fear of burnout and over commitment may however sometimes be an excuse for not saying yes instead of trusting that the spirit will provide what is necessary to accomplish God's amazing work in the world. As with so many challenges in life, it takes balance and constantly staying in communication with the Spirit who will guide us. This quote from Saint Francis of Assisi has helped me cope with my fears of over-burdening myself: "First do what is necessary, then do what is possible and before long you will find yourself doing the impossible." Peace to you and a blessed Easter Season!

Spring Oblate Meetings at Saint Joan of Arc, Minneapolis, MN continued: Perspectives, new understanding and the balancing of our desire and need for rootedness (stabilitas) with the reality of change (conversion). This realization can help us to persevere and prosper in the process of discerning God's will.

May 18 will be our final meeting of the season at Saint Joan's before we gather in July for the Oblate retreat at Saint John's Abbey. For any questions or comments that you have about Oblate meetings at Saint Joan of Arc Church, please contact Ron Joki (rejslp@aol.com, 953-544-4525). His mailing address is 1350 Westwood Hills Rd, St. Louis Park, MN 55426.