

The Oblate

News Magazine of the Oblates of Saint John's Abbey

June 2022

Volume 66 Number 2

Saint John's Oblate Retreat, July 15-17, 2022

Theme: Looking at Paths Already Well-Traveled in Search of New Beginnings

After Fr. Cyprian Weaver, OSB gave his presentation to the monthly oblate zoom formation meeting on May 7, numerous oblates asked for Cyprian to come back and meet with them again.

Father Michael then asked Father Cyprian to give the Oblate Retreat. He agreed and will serve up some interesting surprises on the theme above.



Father Cyprian is a monk of Saint John's Abbey. He did his undergrad work at Saint John's, graduating in 1968, and was ordained to the priesthood in 1972. He received his MA in Systematic Theology in 1975 and his Ph.D. in human biology in 1991 at the University of Colorado and his second Ph.D. in neuroendocrinology at the University of Minnesota.

Father Cyprian's good nature and spiritual depth makes him both approachable and spiritually sustaining.

Registration must be received by Wednesday, July 6, 2022. The retreat will be offered both in person and via Zoom. A Zoom link will be sent via email to those who register for the retreat.

Oblate Prayer

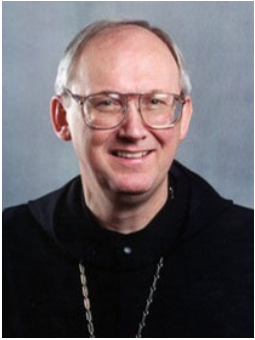
O Loving God, I ask your blessing this day on all the oblates of Saint Benedict, and the monks of Saint John's Abbey with whom we are affiliated. Help us to become people of prayer and peace. Though scattered far and wide, help us to be together in the spirit of your love. Give us hearts wide enough to embrace each other as well as those whose 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 vital witness of justice, compassion, and hope to all.

Retreat Registration Information

To register online, go to <https://www.csbsju.edu/forms/IC9FCHGVWU> or, by visiting saintjohnsabbey.org/oblate-retreat and selecting the link at the bottom of the information page.

To register by surface mail, complete the registration form included inside this newsletter and return it as soon as possible. Registration must be received by July 6, 2022. This is a firm deadline to permit preparations of facilities. Check-in at Mary Hall will be on Friday from 1-6 pm.

Abbot John Klassen, OSB



Some years ago, my monastic classmate Brother Paul Fitt, OSB posed the question: “Have you ever noticed that when you encounter a difficult person in the community, a department, or other situation, when they leave, move,

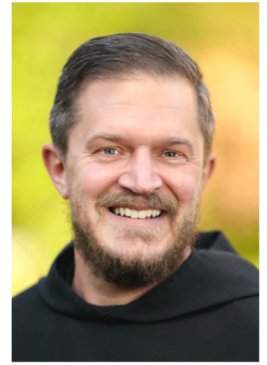
or die, they are replaced immediately by someone just like them?” What Paul observed has the foundational truth of the Second Law of Thermodynamics. That is, it can’t be proven but no exceptions have ever been found! I can never hope that the current relational dilemmas will be improved by a miraculous intervention. This is the first of two observations on this important topic.

I once gave a retreat using the film *A Man Called Ove* as the opening. Ove is a funny but tragic character who has lost the love of his life, Sophia. He has routine worn into the fabric of his body and mind. Each day he makes the same walk around the apartment complex and can become nasty and angry if someone does not meet his unspoken expectations.

Ove’s life story is gradually revealed and we discover a sequence of tragic losses that, time and again, have bludgeoned him and smothered hope and a positive sense of his life. Nevertheless, he is emotionally and spiritually rescued by some of his neighbors who walk with him, who challenge him, and draw the best from him, even when he is determined not to be of assistance.

That is the second observation. We need to stay in relationship with those who are difficult to love: to challenge, support, share human affection even when it meets dismissal. Who knows but that it will ultimately be transformative? To a degree it was for Ove.

Fr. Michael Peterson, OSB



In chapter 72 of the Rule, Saint Benedict says of The Good Zeal that the monks should each try to be the first to show respect to one another. Wow! Yet, this is not automatic for those who frequent God’s house, who know God’s mercy, of how to respect our neighbor. It’s not automatic! You can know the entire Bible, you can know all the right prayers, but to know isn’t automatically to show respect. Respect requires not a warm-fuzzy feeling, but daily choices of how to act towards others.

I remember some time back at my former monastery at Blue Cloud Abbey, SD, about 9:00 PM, an angry man, a stranger, was yelling up a storm downstairs near our kitchen. I didn’t know what to do. I froze. One of my brother monks came up to him and simply asked, “Hi, I’m Fr. Tom, are you hungry?” “Yes,” the man said in a tired way. Both went into the kitchen and heated up some leftovers and ate together. Later, I saw them, and the angry man was laughing, “Oh, thanks Father, I needed that!” And Fr. Tom said, “I needed that too!” That’s mutual respect! Tom showed me a great lesson in respect. Respect is both giving and receiving from the stranger.

There are signs around many monasteries — “All are welcome.” This may sound nice, but it is a very radical statement. Welcome sounds nice, but that word “all” is a different story. All?! That’s a very universal word, unmistakable with no exceptions in the fine print. Benedict writes again in chapter 4:8, “You must respect everyone.”

From the Editor, Fr. Don Tauscher, OSB

Major seasons have filled the space and time since the previous issue of *The Oblate*.

Lent and Easter are, or should or could be, times of spiritual transformation. Most



likely the transformation is not easily visible but chances are that others notice that we sound differently, act somewhat differently, and don't say some things that we used to say. Of course God sees and knows the whole story.

Throughout these seasons we repeatedly, frequently, hear the Scriptures and the Liturgy urge us to love one another. To make it a bit more interesting, we hear Jesus actually command us to love one another "as I have loved you." That sounds all right in church but then we leave church or *lectio* and we meet up with reality in the real world, yes?

Chances are 100% that we'll soon encounter some unlovable or some hard-to-love person or persons and whoa What did Jesus command? Did he mean we are to love the nice folks or those who treat us as we like to be treated? Or: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

And how was that? Surely there must be some exceptions, right? But search the Gospels with all the diligence I can muster and no, Jesus made no exceptions. What he did was model for us how to love as he did.

In this issue **Oblates Pam Keul, Lucy Fallon, and Sheila Hannon** tell us how they were able to love someone "hard-to-love." I believe we all have had the experience of being able to

love a hard-to-love person, thanks to God's grace. But maybe we still have more to learn and grow into when we find still others who are almost impossible to love.

What would Jesus do, eh?

Candidate Barbara Marincel tells us how her mother helped her know how to love.

Benedictines are traditionally known as people of the book. We read. In this issue **Oblates Eileen Wallace and Jane Hagerman** offer ideas for reading and *lectio divina*.

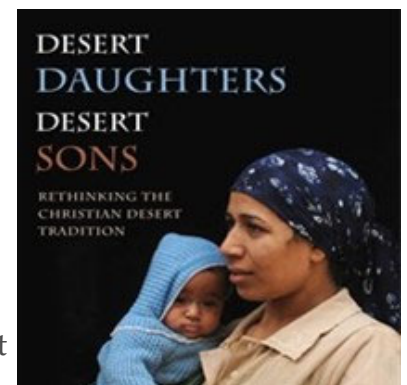
Rachel Wheeler, ObISB and 2012 SOT/Sem



graduate, has recently published two books. Her first, *Ecospirituality: An Introduction*, introduces the environmentally-oriented spirituality of the Christian tradition.

She most recently published *Desert Daughters, Desert Sons: Rethinking the Christian Desert Tradition*, for which she received a 2021 Catholic Media Association Award honorable mention in spirituality.

Desert Daughters, Desert Sons argues that a new reading of the texts of the Christian desert tradition is needed to present the women who inhabit the texts.



Rachel currently serves as a professor of spirituality at the University of Portland.

Loving the Hard-to-Love

Loving - a Tall Order, by Lucy Fallon, ObISB

Cole Porter: What is this thing called Love?

Jesus: Love your neighbor, as I love you.

Benedict: Listen with the ear of your heart.

These are tall orders for us humans, and especially us as oblates! What about the “really hard to love”? I had the pleasure of working Inpatient Psychiatry for over 20 years, and loved it. Not always easy! Our patients were primarily inner city, homeless folks, cast out by many.

One story I can tell is about a man we had many times. One day he asked if someone would accompany him to the bank, 3-5 blocks away. A few staff said they couldn't. I was available and agreed. This man had Chronic Schizophrenia. He was a large man, and sometimes threatening. He believed that ONLY women would go to heaven, except for himself and his beloved doctor who listened well to him. As we walked along, I told him about a recent trip to Ireland I had been on. He listened intently and had info he knew about that country to share. He did his banking, and on the way back he said, “We should do this more often; we each learn.” I agreed and we did more talking about my travels.

He decided I should be called “The Tour Guide of Heaven,” and also included a title for his Doc, “The Surgeon General of Heaven.” We both were duly humbled. This man taught me to be more aware and practice the three quotes I

started with. I invite you to do the same!!

Loving Those We Find Difficult, by Sheila Hannon, ObISB

I loved my job. I worked in a position in which I helped mentally ill people achieve the level of care necessary to improve their lives. At some point, a position as manager of the department became available. I applied and received the position. I then became the manager of those who had been my peers.

I never expected the level of resentment present every day for the three years I held the position. I know I made mistakes along the way as I was

new to management. I did make every effort to be the best I could. The office was remodeled to give each worker their own space. A holiday party was offered at management expense, to which staff replied with a demand for a specific dollar amount and to exclude man-

agement from attending. At that same time, I came into the office to find charcoal on the bulletin board with a note stating this is what management deserved for the holiday. These are but two examples of the egregious behaviors.

Every day as I walked in to work I asked, “What is it you are trying to teach me here, Lord?” I finally got the message. As Jesus himself said, “ If they don't accept you in this village, shake the dust from your feet and move to the next.”



I took early retirement and went home to lovingly care for my ailing husband who was losing his sight to an incurable and untreatable eye disease. One of the best decisions I have ever made. I'll be honest, it took a long time and a lot of prayer. I have come to love the folks who made the workplace so onerous, and that with God's grace I was able to move on with gratitude for the quality time I spent with my husband.

The Place of Humility in Dealing With Those We Find Difficult, by Oblate Pam Keul, OblSB

A couple of years ago I was in our oblate chapter meeting expressing my angst over the behavior of one of my family members. There was a child involved, and I'd been at my wits end for a long time. That family member wouldn't see my version of the light -- on my timeline!

One of my fellow oblates in our meeting that day shared a question he'd asked himself. That question has come to be very helpful and meaningful to me. "Do I really think I'm going to change this person?" That question put things in perspective. The family member I have found so difficult has a Higher Power, and that Higher Power is not me.

We humans like to feel safe and protected. Some people throw what feel like bombs, stinky and scary, into the spaces we share with them. When we are focused on the behavior of another, especially when there are children involved, we can live in a state of terror; anyway I did. If we love a difficult person, sticking around to try to help her or him be less difficult can seem like the only option, but it is not.

I had prayed and prayed but neglected to leave the results with God where they belonged. I had not kept my focus on what I could reasonably do — get a good night's sleep, increase my time

in nature, clean out a closet.

Regulating the breath with long exhalations can lead to a state of calm. Simple activities can turn even a ruminator like me away from dead end obsession. What? No drama? No showing up with all the answers? No hand wringing and self-righteousness? The assumed power of being the fixer can be a cherished power, even though those in the habit of causing problems generally learn best by experience.

When I remember that God's ways are not my ways (Isaiah 55:8), I'm free for life-giving pursuits, such as recognizing that the person I find difficult is doing the best she or he can do right now. I can stand behind a short, imaginary wall of protection where I have the presence of mind to put on my own oxygen mask instead of practicing desperation. I can stand aside so I don't block Divine light and assistance from getting to the person who's been the object of my distress.



Knowing God is God and I am human allows me to love from and rest in a place of trust and hope and safety, instead of trying to prevent imagined disasters from becoming reality.

Ron Joki April 2022 Chapter

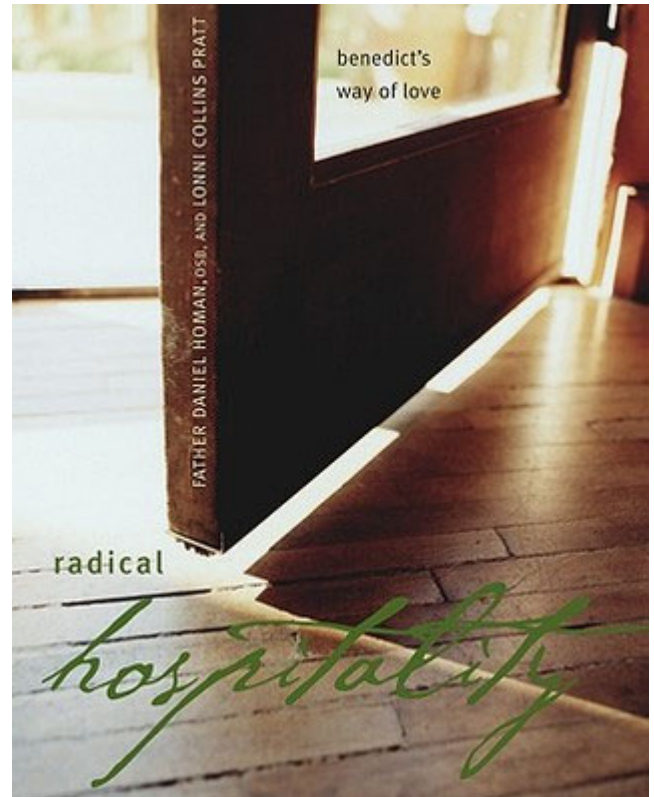
“This Old House” is a Public Broadcasting (PBS) tv show that I occasionally watch. It is a show where people’s houses are repaired and remodeled by a crew of skilled craftspeople, some of whom are expert carpenters, plumbers, electricians, etc., who plan and oversee particular aspects of the projects. Others are general laborers who, while not as specialized in their work, are still important team members. All of them need to work in harmony, respecting their coworkers’ abilities and training while completing the tasks assigned to them.

Much of this reminds me of how a healthy monastery operates and how oblates can best reflect these practices and values in their lives in Christ. The *Rule* of Saint Benedict gives us a template for the building and maintenance of such a community of believers. For example, Chapter 4, “The Tools for Good Works,” and Chapter 7, “Humility,” give us a general foundation in many Christian essentials outlined throughout Sacred Scripture. Other chapters speak to specialized needs and circumstances which might be compared to repair and maintenance of rooms or roofs, pipes or wiring.

Whether in a house, a monastery or an oblate community, God seeks workers in a multitude of people, creating each with unique gifts and experiences that are put to work in particular aspects of their communities. All are important in their active participation, remembering that “they should each try to be the first to show respect to the other (see Rom 12:10), supporting with the greatest patience one another’s weaknesses of body or behavior, and earnestly competing in obedience to one another” (RB 80:72).

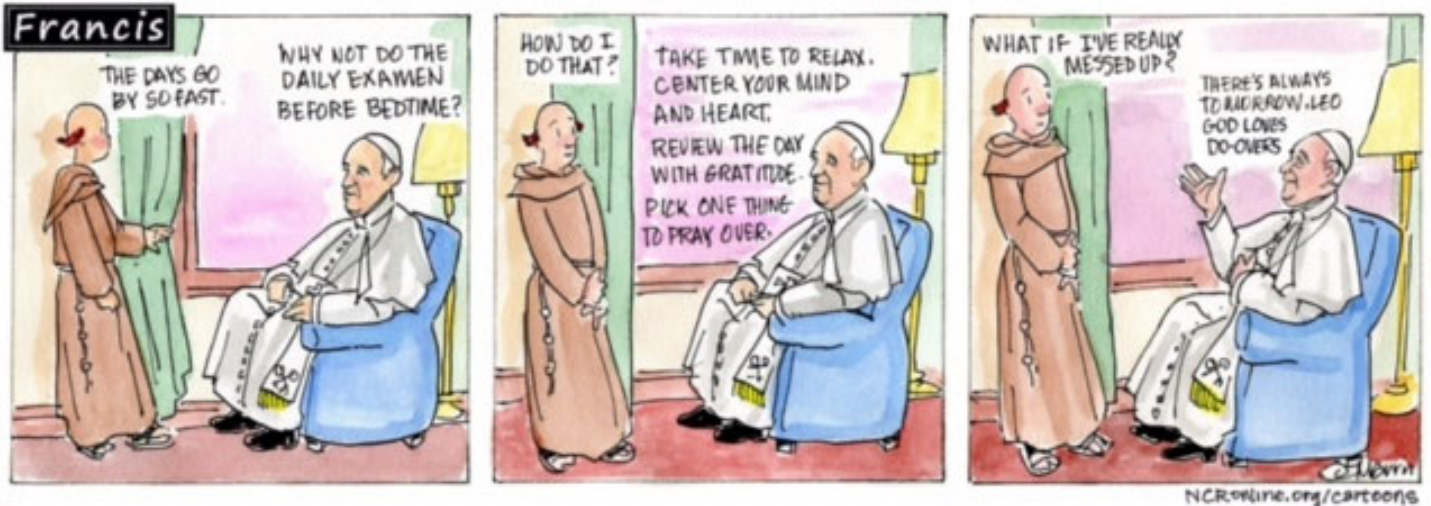
What are the gifts of the Holy Spirit and unique

life experiences that contribute to the health and cohesion of the oblate community? What parts of the *Rule* speak to you most clearly about how we can both maintain what we value and build for the future? These are some of the questions we discussed at our April meeting.



Love for Enemies

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt 5: 43-48)



Every day The National Catholic Reporter prints an online column entitled “Pencil Preaching” by Pat Marrin, who gives a solid inspiring reflection on the day’s Lectionary readings. On Tuesdays and Thursdays Marrin includes a cartoon he draws and texts. Because your editor likes them a lot you can find a sample above. *Ed.*

What Monks and Oblates Are Reading Now

Jane Hagerman, ObISB

Lectio Divina is woven into the texture of our life as oblates. Fr. Luke Dysinger, OSB suggests that the slow, prayerful experience of scripture or other sacred texts includes reading, pondering and praying. Staying faithful to this practice helps open our hearts to God’s Word and God’s presence in our life.

Currently, the ‘table book’ that the monks of Saint John’s are reading aloud during meals at the monastery is *Paul: A Biography* by N.T. Wright.

The Southeast Wisconsin Oblate Chapter is reading *Reaching for God: the Benedictine Oblate Way of Life* by Roberta Werner, OSB (Liturgical Press 2013). This Chapter meets on Zoom every other month on the afternoon of the second or third Wednesday.

The Collegeville Oblate Chapter is reading *Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love* by Lonni Collins Pratt and Fr. Daniel Homan, OSB (Paraclete Press 2011). The group meets in person on the third Sunday of every month except during summer. At each gathering a volunteer

leads a discussion of one chapter in the book. The final three chapters in the fall will conclude the book and then the group moves on to another book of their choosing.

The Saint Joan of Arc Chapter, named for the Minneapolis parish where the group meets in person the third Sunday of the month except during summer, also reflected on hospitality. Before a recent meeting the convener, Oblate Ron Joki, wrote: We have touched on some ways that we can understand the Benedictine value of hospitality. We have drawn from *All Are Welcome: Practicing Christ’s Call to Hospitality*, by Agnes Kovacs (Twenty-Third Publications, 2020). We also drew discussion points from *Radical Hospitality, Benedict’s Way of Love*, the same book used by the Collegeville group. We have received insightful ideas from Oblate Rich Lux on Jewish-Christian history/dialogue. Many would agree that we live in chaotic times. Fr. Daniel and Lonni observe: “Benedict lived in the same kind of chaos.” This makes Benedict particularly timely.

Reflections from Retirement

Eileen Wallace, OblSB

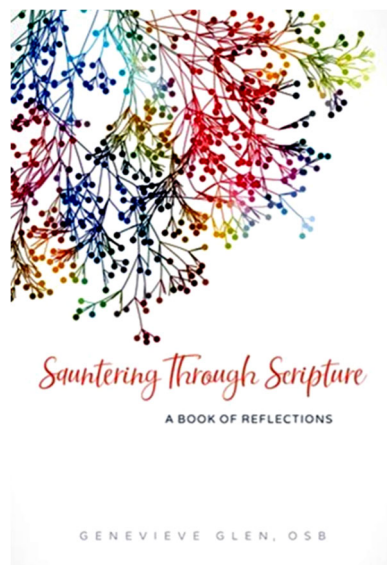


Sauntering Through Scripture (2018) and *By Lamplight* (2021), by Genevieve Glen, OSB, published by Liturgical Press.

One of the spiritual practices I in-

corporated even before becoming an oblate was reading something of substance by a spiritual teacher during breakfast. It completed my morning prayer and preparation before going to work. As a subscriber to *Give Us This Day*, I always appreciated Sr. Genevieve Glen's reflections and was delighted when a collection of her reflections from GUTD and others were published in 2018 as *Sauntering Through Scripture*. The title caught me; the content held me. What a joyful way to start the day.

Sr. Genevieve covers Hebrew and Christian scripture in three sections of Passages, People, and Prayers and Psalms. Her work is light into mysterious parables, oft said prayers and prayers that accompany our dead, and passionate psalms of pain and love. Her writing flows easily and smoothly, like poetry filled with wonder and knowing and a delightful use of the language to explore and wander.



By Lamplight was published in 2021 and can be used as a reflection resource throughout the liturgical year. It covers Passages and People, Prayers and Psalms, Advent and Christmas, and Lent and Easter. Sr. Genevieve takes the scripture stories and they are the starting point, the diving board into the unknown or the lost or the grief or how God's ever present being permeates every particle of our lives and the specificity of our experience.



The joy of this work is Sr. Genevieve's comfort and love for Scripture and how it reflects the everydayness of our lives. This includes not only the bear in the backyard of the monastery eating plums, but the cranky thoughts, the anger at being ignored or treated badly, the hesitancy in offering care to another--all the humanity we are and that God loves without hesitation. Amazing, isn't it?

Sr. Genevieve is a contemplative nun of the Abbey of St. Walburga in northern Colorado. Out of that contemplative practice, her grounding in Benedict's rule and her relationship with the Trinity come through loud and clear in her writing. Maybe you won't always read her at breakfast, rather, maybe on a rainy afternoon or when life is heavy and hard and God has seemed to disappear. Whenever you read her work, you'll find Sr. Genevieve is an enlightening and caring companion for the heart. She truly gives breakfast cereal and the day a whole new flavor.

Kindness in the Rule of Saint Benedict, Part 1

Fr. Cyril Gorman, OSB

There is a lot about kindness in the Rule of Saint Benedict. One can summarize three ways to express kindness with the letter H, three times. Given space limitations we will include one H in this and the next two issues of *The Oblate*.

The first H is for hospitality. *Am I being hospitable in my current situation?* We are used to hearing Benedict say that all guests are to be received as Christ. To be honest, I am a little uncomfortable when I see that expression engraved in stone and posted on the wall of the guesthouse. I personally think it would be better if the guest could experience being treated as Christ rather than we tell them this is what we are doing. Of course, there is always the possibility of failing to live up to the ideal.

Hospitality is not always a straightforward thing. One trap is to be of the mindset that if I am a hospitable person I must always be on the giving end. But hospitality is not just the ability to receive the guest; it is the ability to receive what the guest has to give.

Along those lines there is the Gospel story of Zacchaeus climbing a tree to see Jesus. Once for a reconciliation service in St. Martin, Minnesota, I used that text as the basis for a homily and I pointed out how it is a story where it is not clear who is the host and who is the guest. Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus' house, so Zacchaeus is the host, right? But Jesus offers Zacchaeus salvation, so doesn't that make Jesus the host and Zacchaeus the guest?

I thought I was pretty insightful but when I mentioned it to Abbot John he told me that a lot has been written about how there are lots of stories in Scripture like that. One of the famous ones is of the angels coming to Abraham and

Sarah. As guests the angels are welcomed to the tent dwelling. But the announcement that Sarah will give birth comes from these angels. Abraham and Sarah become the receivers, not the givers of hospitality.

According to one writer, the reason that the so-called Beloved Disciple could lean into the chest of Jesus at the Last Supper was that he and not Jesus was the host of the meal. But given all that the Last Supper means for us as the institution of the Eucharist, a commemoration of all that was happening and was about to happen, who does not think of Jesus, the Christ, as host?



Elizabeth welcomes Mary into her home where both are host and guest.

Isn't the basic principle true for all of us: whether we are spiritual director, priest, spouse, parent, mother, friend? It is a great honor and very humbling when other persons entrust their story to us. On the one hand we are the host and yet at the same time, we are a guest being invited into another's inner life. In that sense, we each have, at different moments, the role of novice master, wise elder, abbot or prior, because we are being asked to walk with other persons on their respective journeys. In the realm of kindness it may at times be better to receive than to give.

Wisdom from My Mother



My mom, who died on April 15, 2007, would have turned 94 this past May 10. I miss her dreadfully but am beyond grateful for the gift of her, and

as I remember her, I wonder if she wasn't a bit of a Benedictine herself? The following list is taken from the eulogy I gave at her funeral:

Top Ten Things I Learned from My Mother:

1. Love is the only thing that really matters. You can lose your possessions, your job, and your health, but you can always hold on to love. And finally, it is the only thing that makes life worth living.
2. Decorate your house with bookcases, because you can never have too many books! Nothing ever seems quite so bad if you can curl up with a good book and a cup of hot cocoa.
3. Class is not determined by money or social position; rather, a truly classy person is one who goes out of her way to make others feel comfortable and special. Classy people are warm, generous, and kind.
4. You will never get old if you are always interested in other people and continue to learn new things.
5. Life is not fair. But that does not mean it cannot still be good, even wonderful, if you retain a sense of gratitude and remember what really matters – to love others and to let them love you in return.

Barbara Marincel, Oblate Candidate

6. God does not send us tragedy and pain but does give us the strength to bear them, the courage to face them, and the grace to learn and grow from them.
7. Listen to your heart and follow your star. You never know where they might lead you!
8. Yes, you are your brother's, and your sister's keeper. Always remember that whatever you do to the least of them, that you do to Jesus.
9. What others think of you does not matter. It is what you think of yourself that counts.
10. It takes more muscles to frown than to smile, and holding a grudge takes too much energy.

(Plus, Two Extra, from me)

1. Never, ever, take the people you love for granted. And never hesitate to say, "I love you."
2. Tough times do not last. But tough people do.

The love, in all its many dimensions, that I received from my mom, along with the wisdom I gained from her words, and even more, her example, today deeply ground my faith and spirituality. There is good reason, I think, that one of our most used images of God is that of a loving parent. We are formed by our parents and families; we find our first experience of love with them, and if we are not blessed with such love, it can do lifelong damage.

When I reflect upon my experience of being part of the Saint John's oblate community, I realize that the monks and fellow oblates I have come to know model for me the same warmth, generosity, joyful love of God and each other, and kindness that I saw in my mom. Thanks to all of you for this! You make my heart glad.

Milestones

Candidacy:

Andrew Bins, Cheboygan, WI, 2.03.22

Jeanne Cofell, Cold Spring, MN, 4.04.22

Christine Peterson, Minneapolis, MN, 4.28.22

Oblation:

Nick Cichowicz, Minneapolis, MN, 3.03.22. Pictured at right are Nick, his wife and children, flanked by Father Michael Peterson, OSB and Brother Walter Kiefer, OSB

Deaths:

Oblate Jim Eisenschenk died in 2020.

Oblate Joseph Clements died on May 26.

If you know of an oblate who died in 2022, please notify the oblate office: oblates@csbsju.edu

Thank you.



Monastic Institute June 27-July 1, 2022

Finally, after two years of Covid-19, we once again can offer in person, the Monastic Institute. What can one who attends expect?

Letting go of the demands of the ego begins with fear of the Lord. The ascent of the ladder of humility leads to that perfect love that casts out fear. Come and explore the wisdom of the monastic tradition on this central challenge of embracing the Cross of Christ with the assistance of highly-regarded spiritual guides.

Fr. Luke Dysinger, OSB. Monk of St. Andrew's Abbey, Valyermo, CA; Professor of Church History and Moral Theology at St. John's Seminary, Camarillo, CA.

Sr. Manuela Scheiba, OSB, Abbey of St. Gertrude, Alexanderdorf, Germany; Instructor in the Monastic Institute at Sant' Anselmo, Rome since 2008

Fr. Michael Casey, OCSO. Monk of Tarrawarra Abbey, Australia; Received his doctorate from Melbourne College of Divinity for a study of desire for God in the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux. For the past decades he has been engaged in exploring different aspects of monastic spirituality, writing, and giving conferences throughout the English speaking world.

Oblates are invited to register online.

<https://www.csbsju.edu/sot/lifelong-learning/monastic>

RENEWAL OF OBLATION

Peace! In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, I renew my oblation and offer myself to Almighty God as an oblate of Saint John's Abbey. I promise again, before God and all the saints, as my state in life permits: STABILITY OF HEART, FIDELITY TO THE SPIRIT OF THE MONASTIC LIFE, AND OBEDIENCE TO THE WILL OF GOD, according to the *Rule* of Saint Benedict.

NAME _____ DATE _____ WITNESS _____



The Oblate

THAT IN ALL THINGS GOD MAY BE GLORIFIED

NEWSLETTER OF THE OBLATES OF SAINT BENEDICT: *published three times annually (February, June, October).*

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Mark Your Calendar

June 27-July 1, 2022 Monastic Institute

July 15-17, 2022 Annual Oblate Retreat



Easter at the Abbey

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