



The World Community for Christian Meditation

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OBLATE REFLECTION | Don Myrick | November/December 2007

Since this year we are celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of John Main's death I thought that rather than reflect on a specific passage of the Rule we should perhaps take a look at his approach to it, in particular as it applies to the oblate community. I hope I'm not being to presumptuous by expounding on what I feel is his understanding of the Rule, however he did leave behind quite a body of writing, and on top of that his life itself during his monastic days and his relationship to the oblate community have been well documented.

Father John of course was both the founder and teacher of our community but it is the integrated vision he wished to share with all of us that makes taking a closer look at it from time to time important. Father John saw the oblates as an integral part of the monastic community. And although it is part of the oblate commitment to share in the work of the community, our real job is to participate and be faithful to the prayer life of the community and in doing so being part of what Father Laurence has so aptly dubbed the "monastery without walls".

I think it is pretty safe to say that Father John did not see becoming an oblate as taking on additional cumbersome layers of spiritual practice, in fact quite the opposite. For him if the monastic vision was about anything it was about simplicity, flexibility to one's own circumstances and accessibility to all. For him the Rule and the practice of meditation merged together in a seamless unity that embraced the whole of our lives, bringing them into an integrated simplicity grounded in the experience of Christ within.

The Rule therefore was not an end in itself but a set of practical principals which lay out the framework in which this journey of seeking God could take place and be nourished. It deals with all aspects of day to day life: community governance, right relationships, care and concern for others particularly the vulnerable, deep listening and openness, balance and moderation in all things, attentiveness, the primacy of prayer.

These were the principals Father John lived by and for those of us who were fortunate enough to have known him it was obvious that his integration of these principles enabled him to enter into that liberty of spirit of which he so often talked.

In that sense the Rule for him was not just an ancient static document, but one in which the understanding of, and living out of has evolved over the millennia. This does not imply a watering down of those principals but a serious adaptation to help them mesh with modern day to day life. Father John was well aware of the narcissism and rudderlessness of the

modern world and yet he loved the world in which he lived. He did not see life in terms of "we" and "they" but as a whole of which we are all part. There is little doubt that he saw the Rule as a blueprint that could have great value to modern society. In one instance he compared the meditation community to the leaven in a loaf of bread. The yeast is just a small part of the whole loaf but permeates the whole of it and is what makes it rise.

At the end of the day it is all about simple fidelity to our daily practice; our twice daily meditation, regular reading of the Rule and for those of us who are able, part of the divine office each day, which incidentally, he saw as a form of communal "lectio divina" and a preparation for "pure prayer".

Perhaps the best way to explore all of this a little further would be for us to dust off our copies of "Community of Love" and "Letters From The Heart" and make a little advent project of rereading excerpts from them. For newer members of the community Father Laurence has reedited "Letters" and the "Present Christ".

Both are published in a single volume entitled "Monastery Without Walls". It is available from Medio Media and I would suggest it as almost required reading for our community as it really gives an in depth look at his spiritual vision.

Peace be with you all!

Sincerely,

Don

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