



Via Vitae

A Way of Life

The Benedictine Oblate Community of The World Community for Christian Meditation

The Benedictine Oblate Path - for Today

Since the time of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, when the Christian monastic movement began, there have been many ways of expressing the monastic archetype. Even in the Desert there were anchorites, hermits and coenobites. The Desert wisdom also knew that the monastic archetype dwells in each human soul as that which orientates us to seek God "before everything else". For the monk the archetype takes a visible expression in what we call the monastic life – a life that received its great expression in the Rule of St Benedict. But those working in the world can no less be in touch with the power of this archetype and form a special bond and community with those living in monasteries. The oblate expresses this bond in the monastic archetype by uniting monk and lay person in a way that is especially powerful and necessary today.

If there are different kinds of monks it is not surprising that we find new forms of oblation developing today to respond to the particular spiritual needs of our time.

Thirty years ago John Main received the first oblates of a small monastic community he had started with a special emphasis on the practice and teaching of meditation. He saw his experiment as a restoration of the essential link between the traditional form of monastic prayer in the Divine Office and the *oratio pura* as taught by Cassian whom St Benedict points us towards at the end of his Rule.

Monastic life today is in crisis and is seeking new forms of serving the Kingdom of God through the Church. The insight of John Main that 'meditation (*oratio pura*) creates community' is proving to be of great relevance to this search. It is impossible that the monastic charism will die and therefore it is inevitable that it will take new forms. This must include a more flexible and less legalistic approach to monastic commitment and it will place less emphasis on the clerical aspect of the monastic vocation as it has developed in the western tradition. As Bede Griffiths once said "every Benedictine monastery must be a centre of contemplation".

In my life as a monk for the past thirty years I have come to believe firmly in the future of Oblates. I feel that new kinds of Benedictine oblates will help develop the new forms of monasticism that our world needs in order to find the spiritual depth from which alone we can respond to our overwhelming problems. The oblates of The World Community for Christian Meditation offer one example of how a new wineskin for the perennial new wine of monasticism can be developed. They do not 'belong' to one particular physical monastery and so form a global 'monastery without walls'. This represents a variation on the idea of *Stabilitas* but one that can speak powerfully to people's experience of community in the 21st century without in the least diminishing the value of physical stability.

They are men and women, spread through many parts of the world, committed to a regular practice of contemplative prayer which they integrate with the *opus dei* and the vows of St Benedict. Like all Christian contemplatives they are conscious of their silent presence at the heart of the church and their love for the world radiates from this centredness in the Body of Christ. Many lead meditation groups, in schools, churches, prisons and hospitals. Others are involved in teaching children to integrate the contemplative dimension of prayer at an early stage of their spiritual journey. Others specialise in inter-faith dialogue and in work for unity and peace in our fragmented and violent world. Some of our younger oblates are now choosing to serve their novitiate as a year of fulltime service and study which becomes a special kind of spiritual formation for their future vocation in life.

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The characteristic Benedictine tradition of tolerance and inclusion, of balanced diversity and stable yet radical openness to conversion is needed today more than ever before. A new manifestation of the spirit of St Benedict is demanded by our times. No one program or group can achieve this as it is the work of Wisdom itself but the Benedictine Oblate has an increasingly important role to play in this contemporary evolution of a great tradition.

With much love *Laurence*



St. Benedict's Monastery, Arcadia, is situated in a beautiful rural area in the north western outskirts of Sydney, Australia

For the past 27 plus years there have been "Meditation Renewal Days" held there on the third Sunday of every third month, commencing each February. This was originally started by Fr. Edward Doran OSB who entered Eternal Life on 5th December, 2008. The monks also offer us their hospitality for our annual oblate retreat each Advent. The monastery is one of the Sylvestrine Congregation and they have a long standing friendship with the Olivetan Congregation.

The "Meditation Renewal Days" are a great support for the Sydney meditation community and beyond. We start with the celebration of Eucharist and have two sessions of meditation, two input sessions and we join the monks for Midday Prayer. Those new to Christian meditation are catered for in a beginners group for one session. In recent years the Sydney oblate community has taken a leadership supporting role in these days.

The above photos were taken on the beautiful sunny autumn third Sunday in May during our lunch break in the beautiful monastery gardens.

Fr Bede Griffiths

Fr Bede Griffiths was a Catholic Benedictine monk who lived in India for forty years and was involved with dialogue with Hinduism. Many people were attracted to visit him at Shantivanam Ashram in Tamil Nadu on the banks of the sacred river Cavery. Shantivanam was, and still is, a Christian Benedictine community but one fully inculturated into Indian forms. Fr Bede used to say that the world religions are like the five fingers of the hand. They are all distinct and we have to respect that the index finger is not the same as the thumb. However if we go to the heart of each religion then it is like going down from the fingers into the palm of the hand, it is there, he used to say that the religions meet. This heart of all faith he believed was the contemplative experience, the practice of the presence of God. That is why Fr Bede appreciated the teachings on meditation in all the religions as a way of leading to the centre.

I knew Fr Bede in the last years of his life and I was in my early twenties. It was a privilege to spend time at Shantivanam listening to his wisdom, learning to meditate and enjoying his presence. He taught me many things, most of all the value of human love. He showed me that embodied love is the meaning of the incarnation and all religions point to the value of the human person, to the 'Word made flesh' in each of us. This is why in the end the human person is more important than religion, they exist for human flourishing. Some years ago I wrote this poem of seven verses in eight lines of mixed rhyme. I think it still reflects what I feel even though, like all contemplative experience, it is all in the commas!

Memories of Fr Bede Griffiths

Like water holiness has no colour or form of itself
And because of that it reflects the sun.
The whole universe is reflected in it, moon and stars,
And we see ourselves as in a mirror.
Holiness bears no description,
Like water it moulds itself to the changing earth,
It cannot be discussed or analysed, it simply is,
And the mind awakes to recognise the real.

Father Bede wrote many books,
His story was famous throughout the world,
Hailed as a prophet, and yet to me
His silence what stays in the memory.
It is of that silence I would like to speak
If it is possible to speak of silence.
To do so we must cast aside
The familiar furniture of the rational mind
And make a space for the great unknown.

For in that place Fr Bede was at home.
In all humanity he found the image of God
That was prior to all belief in God.
And he gave to each an infinite value.
In all religions he found that core of unity,

Each has its unique truth and yet the fullness
Of truth was found in their meeting
And the meeting place was the human heart.

His mind soared higher and higher
To take in a universal view
And yet, as an Eagle keeps its nest
At the centre of its flight, so did Bede keep Christ.
Then there, in the depth of silent prayer,
Taking care not to bring any thought with him,
He entered the heart and deep within
He discovered the eternal feminine.

He found the other half of his soul, the eternal One,
In the place where no image or thought can come,
And his life, like a shadow within a fold,
Was folded back to eternity. God took him home.
But we are not left behind to adore
One who passed on to the further shore,
For that same spirit that was inside him
Is deep in the heart of everyone.

I knew him in his final years, after his stroke,
When, sitting in his hut by the river,
I would listen to the silence of long Indian nights.
He and the river combined to bear all thought away.
For the mind is itself a river
That flows from the source to the open sea.
When it encounters the sea its own current dissolves.
In that hut the sea was sitting next to me.

A prophet, a teacher, a personal friend,
I was with him by his bedside when, close to the end,
He spoke of the heart as a furnace of love
And complained that the Indians just couldn't make tea!
He remained to the end just an Englishman
Who had fallen in love with another land,
But the Spirit of God made Fr Bede
A light on the hilltop so that all might see.

Stefan Reynolds
Email: stefandreynolds@yahoo.co.uk

Love Through Meditation

Gerard, my husband, died last November. He had been a strong man, both physically and mentally. He loved the great outdoors; target shooting, sailing, walking, and cycling. He was an avid reader and a great raconteur. He loved company and a good chat and had a wonderful sense of humour.

After his first stroke about ten years ago, and subsequent strokes, there was a slow decline in his condition over the years. This gradual 'loss' or 'letting go' of the things he loved was very painful for him and it was a difficult time for us both.

My daily meditation sessions, the reading of the Divine Office and Joan Chittister's book "The Rule of St Benedict" were my lifeline. The great gift of meditation

is life changing. There came a time when Gerard was able to accept his “loss” and perhaps more importantly, when I too was able to accept our changed lifestyle.

It was important to take the attention off myself and focus it on Gerard. I was never a very demonstrative or tactile person but I realised that Gerard needed a more physical response from me: he loved to have his hand held, his face caressed. He needed to hear the three little worlds “I love you”. And in a strange way I came to love him more deeply in his frailty and his vulnerability.

Gerard never complained and a peace settled within him which friends noticed. There is no doubt in my mind that the daily commitment to prayer and the mantra transformed us both. We began saying prayers together daily. Gerard no longer found it embarrassing.

There is an entry in my diary on a paragraph in “The Rule of Benedict” - “The Sick: ...never to give up on life and never to doubt that every bit of kindness, every tender touch we lay upon another in life can heal what might otherwise have died, certainly in them, perhaps even in ourselves.”

There is an absence in the house, the absence of his life, the absence of his voice, face and presence. But I feel Gerard has left me his peace.

Anita Finnigan, Portland, Dorset
Email: finnigan1@smartone.co.uk

My Journey to Oblation

My name is Pierre Corcoran. I am an oblate and I live and work in the Christian Meditation Retreat Centre. At present, there are three oblates in residence here; Lukasz from Poland, Tony from China and myself from Ireland. Sr. Catherine Quane SM is our director of retreats and Angela Greenwood is our overseer and aide.

How did I arrive here?.. I have always had a strong sense of being called. Perhaps we all do. To sense it is one thing, to answer it is another. For many years, I searched, praying, hoping for the Spirit to place before me the path I am to walk. Though the good church granted me numerous opportunities to enter into the seminary and monastery, I never felt certain that I had found my path.

In April 2006, I happened upon Laurence Freeman’s retreat at Dzogchen Beare in the county of Cork, Ireland. I told him of my desire to leave my job in the bank - good-timing some might say! – and to enter into the mystery of my vocation wherever that may be. I asked had he any suggestions. He talked of the retreat centre here in Cockfosters and the opportunity to work and pray in the spirit of oblation as envisioned by Fr. John Main. In August 2006, I moved to London.

My first year passed, I’m here almost 3 years and have taken a vow to remain for a further 3 years. Why? For the first time in my life, I am fully satisfied. There is no more doubt. Hope has won. The profound wisdom and guidance of the oblate way of life nurtures me. We are a community of lay monastics, who try to live according

to the Rule of Saint Benedict. We are an intimate family but also open to the wider community. The door is always open for those who call. We offer a place of prayer to an ever growing number of people, far and wide.

We offer thrice daily meditation to the public. Our afternoon meditations, in particular, have become most popular with the elders of our parish. It has become custom to invite those present for tea/coffee every Monday and Friday and it is one of the few social functions that they have in their week. The elders have told us many times that our hospitality reminds them of that of Dom Placid’s time when he was alive and well. This makes us very happy and has been an unexpected, natural flowering to our life in the wider community of Cockfosters. Growth is a wonderful thing.

I am very positive for the future. Though we have an efficient and stable core group of helpers we, as all Christian communities should, remain open to growth. Indeed, the Spirit is growth. We strive each day to make real the vision of John Main’s community of love.

Pierre Corcoran, C M R C, Cockfosters
Email: pierrecorcoran@hotmail.com

Canadian Oblates



From left to right: Ron Dicks, Don Myrick, Flora Benoit, Darrell Tessier, Katherine Lelievre, Paul Harris, George Brown.

Picture taken at an Oblate gathering on May 9, 2009 in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

At this event we meditated together and watched a DVD entitled “Soul Searching”, which was on the life of Thomas Merton, and provided by Paul Harris. Following this the group shared lunch and conversation together.

Ron Dicks, Ottawa, Canada
rdicks@rogers.com

An 11th Century Pope affirmed:

The oblate’s profession deserves nothing but praise, and it is worthy to endure, being as it is a reproduction of the primitive state of the Church. We therefore approve of it and confirm it and style it a Holy and Catholic institution.

(Bull of Urban II, addressed to the Abbot of Hirschau)

Contributed by Fr. Kevin Maksym

Benedictine Daily Prayer Book

At the Oblate retreat in Monte Olivetti last year I noticed that many people had a large prayer book and I wondered what it was. This was the start of my discovery of *Benedictine Daily Prayer: A Short Breviary*, which contains such beautiful psalms and readings for each day. These prayers were modelled for us during the retreat and we also had the great pleasure of going to the monastery and hearing the monks praying and singing the psalms. Before the retreat ended Trish Panton offered a session on praying with the Breviary for anyone who was interested and so a whole new world opened up for me.

As soon as I returned home I got on the internet and ordered a copy. (I was later to discover that it was on sale in Cork). At first I found it hard to fit in the prayers in addition to meditation and reading the Rule. The only solution was to get up an hour earlier. At this stage I have established a pattern and I can't imagine a day without my psalms and readings and the beautiful and noble petitionary prayers.

I am so glad I was given this grace which has brought such richness to my life. It seems right and appropriate to pray in this way at this stage of my life. The prayers of my youth were mostly to Our Lady. Marriage and children brought frantic prayers for their good health and good behaviour and for me to have the health and strength to rear them. In mid life I discovered Christian meditation and calmed down. I now feel that I have come home.

As I write this it is the feast day of St. Isadore of Seville. The following is a brief extract from one of the readings "Prayer cleanses and reading instructs; if you cannot do both it is better to pray. If you want to be always in God's presence, pray often and read often. When we pray we speak to God; when we read God speaks to us"

Rowena O'Sullivan, Cork, Ireland
Email: rowenaos@gmail.com

How Do We Read The Psalms?

From the letter to Marcellinus on the *Interpretation of the Psalms* by Saint Athanasius – Bishop and Doctor of the Church

Within the Psalter are represented and portrayed

in all their great variety the movements of the human soul.

"Among all the books of the bible, the Psalter has a very special grace, a choiceness of quality well worthy to be pondered. Besides the characteristics which it shares with them, it has this peculiar marvel of its own, that within it are represented and portrayed in all their great variety the movements of the human soul. It is like a picture in which you see yourself portrayed, and seeing, may understand and consequently form yourself upon the pattern given. You find depicted in it all the movements of your soul, all its changes, its ups and downs, its failures and recoveries. In fact, in all the

circumstances of life, we shall find that these divine songs meet our own souls' need at every turn.

The marvel of the Psalter is that, barring those prophecies about the Savior and some about the Gentiles, we take all its words upon our lips, as though they were our own. Each of us sings the Psalms as though they had been written for our special benefit. We take and recite them, not as though someone else were speaking or another person's feelings were being described, but as if we were speaking of ourselves, offering the words to God as our own heart's utterance. We are bold to take them as our own, written for our very self. Whether we have kept the Law or whether we have broken it, it is our own doings that the Psalms describe. We all are bound to find our very self in them and be we faithful soul or sinner, we read in them descriptions of our self.

It seems to me, moreover, that because the Psalms thus serve us who sing them as a mirror, wherein we see our self and our own soul, we cannot help but render them in such a manner that their words go home with equal force to those who hear us sing, and stir them also to a like reaction. In the Psalms, just as in a mirror, the movements of our own souls are reflected. The words are indeed our very own, given us to serve both as a reminder of our changes of condition and as a pattern and model for the amendment of our lives.

The Lord, the true Lord of all, who cares for all his works, did not only lay down precepts but also gave himself as model for how they should be carried out, for all who desire to know and imitate. And therefore, *before* he came among us, he sketched the likeness of this perfect life for us in the Book of Psalms. Just as he revealed himself in flesh to be the perfect one, so in the Psalms people of good will might see the model life portrayed, and find therein the healing and correction of their own."

From *Benedictine Daily Prayer: A Short Breviary*

Feast of St. Athanasius, Bishop and Doctor of the Church May 2. pp. 1872,3

A Gift of a Day

Being a complementary therapist, I was fascinated by the poster at the Retreat Centre at Cockfosters, promoting the Oblate bodywork day, 'Parables of Embodiment.' I confess I am not an oblate but Pierre assured me that I'd be most welcome. As I was the only one of the 26 present on the day taking notes, I was approached by Rita and asked if I would write something for this newsletter - that will teach me.

The day was introduced with the words, 'There are no strangers; just friends we've yet to meet.' As a newcomer, I felt totally welcome - St Benedict would have been delighted with the hospitality offered by the oblate group! A very real community of love.

Giovanni is a truly gifted and enthusiastic teacher – inspired by God. With wonderful humour, he coaxed

us, old wineskins, to awaken to the potential of our bodies to be more fluid, to stretch and to become new wineskins open and ready to be filled with young wine. We were invited to consider our skin in new ways, not only as a barrier but also as a bridge, and to appreciate the wonder of our largest sense organ.

This brought to mind words from a poem by Daniel O’Leary that I had read just a few weeks before in the first chapter of his inspiring book, *Travelling Light: your Journey to Wholeness*.

And God said:
May you delight in your body.
It is my body too....

May your skin rejoice in the passion of the sun;
And your tongue tingle with the joy of new wine.
Don’t you know you are my senses? Without your
Body I cannot be.

The morning session ended with meditation and then we ate a delicious lunch together, the miracle of ‘bring and share’ revealed yet again with a plentiful and varied spread much enjoyed and washed down with plenty of vibrant conversation and coffee. Then we turned our attention to our life-giving breath.

I love Thomas Merton’s prayer,

What I do is live
How I pray is breathe



Giovanni guided us in some gentle exercises to improve our flexibility and quality of breath, urging us to ‘do less’ – music to our ears in a culture that pushes doing more and trying harder as the way to achieve better results. Of course, the lesson was that there is nothing to achieve other than being fully alive in the moment. After a session on ways to improve our posture for meditation, we became more aware of how our posture and breath can aid the deepening of our practice by enabling us to be more comfortable and ‘rooted’ in our stillness and so more present. We ended with further meditation.

It was wonderful to receive the valuable teaching that our bodies are ‘the first of the sacraments’, an essential part of our wholeness, part of our soul to be loved and

cherished. We cannot experience life and all its mysteries without them nor can we meditate. Old teachings have done the body a grave disservice. Jesus took on our human form to show us how to be fully human, to inhabit our bodies with joy and a sense of wonder as we serve of our fellow man.

This was a sun-filled day with a beautiful and powerful stillness in our meditation sessions and much laughter. It occurred to me later that it was a day full of the fruits of the spirit. Yes, they were all there – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control.

Somehow, amongst it all, Maggie (my partner in a paired exercise and new friend) and I discovered that we enjoyed writing haikus. She suggested I write one for this article so, with apologies to haiku purists, this is an attempt to express my gratitude, in the form of a ‘haiku prayer’:

Bless our old wineskins
With green suppleness of Spring.
Fill us with Your grace.

Breath of life, God-now
Breathe into us Your joy
So we may pour out love.

Grazie mille Giovanni.

Felicity Collins, U K

Email c/- Rita McKenna – akarita1@hotmail.com

Eye of the Needle, Nail of the Eye I

Becoming No-thing and Nobody at Easter

The way from our accommodation to the retreat house led through a large woodshed, stacked high with logs, lumber, branches, sticks and strangely-shaped off-cuts. The quiet, dusty air of the place spoke of the patient meeting between the contingent and the ordered. The essence of Eye Abbey – a place where living tradition and the present moment meet in unplanned beauty.

We wanted to make a cross for our Good Friday liturgy. Passing through the woodshed as we moved between meditation sessions, meals, talks and sleep, it had already come to me that this place offered up a special meaning to us – to me at least. Here was the lumber-room of the



ego, full of the messy, the accidental, the apparently unused and unusable. Yeats, in an anguished moment, gives this inner human space an even more searing designation: ‘the

foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart’. This seemed to be the right place to start poking around for the raw materials of our

for the raw materials of our cross. Some of us had come prepared – good retreatants – with hammers, nails, twists of rope.

One of the first great lessons was just how hard it is to make a cross. It's one thing having an airy, dusty timber store filled with motes and beams, it's quite another to make anything of it. And a cross isn't just any old thing. It's the most mysterious object you could choose to fashion, or gaze on, or voluntarily submit to be nailed onto. Hadn't we just had a session reflecting – with each others' help and the insights of Fr Richard Rohr's writing - on the Mystery of the Cross? Hadn't we just lined up in silence in the centre of Eye church, with the small congregation of this ancient Suffolk market town, to take our turns in kissing the foot of the cross? Did we understand what we were doing? Could we? How does the Tree of Death become the Tree of Life?

As I balanced a short, rough length of branch at right angles over a longer one, I realised that this was going to take time. I would have to slow down and I would have to pay attention. I thought of the faces of the workmen in Stanley Spencer's painting of the Crucifixion. We'd been looking at it together that morning. It was their work and they took pride in doing it properly. But it was vicious work. As Spencer imagines it, their faces are right in the face of Jesus, and they are smiling in their eagerness to get the job done, their lips clamped tight on the huge nails they haven't yet used. How to do our work differently as we make this cross?

I need to make space in the wood. I need to create a place where the two pieces can come together, start to become one. A joint of some kind. I think back across forty years to my short-lived woodwork lessons at school. I set off on a search of the many outhouses and sheds which cluster around the Prior's house – the settled deposit of centuries of quiet labour. In another dusty building a rack of time-smoothed chisels. One of these takes great bites of freshly-exposed wood from one of my branches. We have to dig, we have to become bare.

The Scriptural significances of what we were doing start to gather around me in the dust of this open-ended, cavernous shed. Jesus began his life in a stable like this rough, functional, agricultural building. A place of work. And then his own apprenticeship and work: the handling of chisels, the turning of wood, the driving in of nails, the smell of sawdust – the mysterious aroma of the tree moving from life to death and back to life again.

How hard it seems to drive a nail in straight! To hit the mark, to have an eye that is single. My cross-beams were intersecting now, biting comfortably together in the new home of my roughly-made joint, with their pale heartwood exposed. But they needed to be fixed, made stable, united once and for all. As I took aim with my hand and my eye, I paused the hammer in mid-air. We had been talking about this point of intersection at the centre of the cross as the silent, unnamable heart of reality, the 'still point of the turning world'. The meeting

of linear, historical, biographical (horizontal) time and the ever-present timelessness (vertical) of the Eternal Word. The place of self-emptying, self-giving, self-realisation; the place where Jesus chose to be, in order to show us where, and who, we all really are. The invisible point of creativity which manifests everything we see: Creation. The place of Love without beginning and without end. Without, even, a place.

Could I hit that mark? The hammer was still poised in the mote-filled light of the woodshed. I thought of another quote which had been shared over our Easter retreat. Blake's insight that you will believe a lie "when you see with, not through, the eye." What could he mean? All the wisdom teachers urge us to see clearly – Jesus constantly encourages us to see what is before us. Richard Rohr says just GAZE on the mystery of the Cross and you'll get it. Merton finishes his great Zen writings with this simple isolated line: 'It might be good to open our eyes and *see*'. We are all disciples with scales on our eyes. We are all Lear being told fiercely, lovingly by Kent, 'See, better!'

But how? Maybe Blake's was the best clue for now? If we are to look through, and not with, the eye, then the looking must start somewhere else - somewhere hidden and darker, somewhere inside. We must be looking from - through - the heart.

I took aim again. This time it felt more like un-aim, as I let the heart join in, run its energy through my eye and my hand. Bit by bit the huge nail sank into the tough flesh of the tree. The bangs of the hammer on its head crashed and echoed against the wood-stacked walls of the enormous space around us. The bright steel drove unsteadily, at a rakish angle, towards the centre of the cross. With an inch or two still exposed it would go no further, but twisted and bent under my blows until it embedded its remaining length in the smashed bark of the wood. It looked like a tiny human figure, twisted into immobility at the centre of this cross. Not how I'd planned or seen it, but the cross was made and it held.

This is the same cross that cropped up (the cross, at once the supreme seed *and* harvest, our constant crop) on Easter Sunday. We had set it up at the end of the rose walk in the Abbey grounds, at the place where the high altar of the immense and now disappeared Priory church would have stood. One of our retreatants led us in an almost improvised liturgy which was both serious (John Main reinvigorated this word for spiritual practice) and joyous. At one point we moved in procession, which turned into a gentle dance, chanting through the blossom of the gardens. At the cross we read of Mary's all-changing first encounter with the risen Christ. How she first of all mistook him for the gardener. The blossom blazed so thick now in our Suffolk garden that it seemed as though the cross itself was on fire with irresistible flowering.

WAS this the same cross? Yes, and of course, no. Were we the same people whose feet had been washed in Eye church on Thursday evening, who had kissed the feet of

this wooden mystery on Friday and had wept bitter tears on Saturday, the dark day of loss and waiting? Yes, and again, no. There had been transformation. How had this happened? How had the bare tree sprouted? Saturday – the bad joke of Saturday – had seen us, and all of the earth, silent and desolate. We did not know what we were waiting for. Perhaps for Godot? We did not even know if we *were* waiting.

All we knew is that something had been lost, something had emptied itself and something had gone underground. The mustard seed becoming the lodging-place of birds, Christ going down to harrow Hell and the Underworld – all of this had happened, we knew not how. But we *had* been able to participate and we *had* been given a way to do *our* own work of descent. Not for the first time many of us thanked God for meditation.

Each of us has our transformative work to do in the world (with the aim, as St Augustine puts it, of becoming what we are) and so we all work in the woodshed of our lives, in the best way that we know how, fashioning crosses of all shapes and sizes, finished, improvised, unique. Beyond that, we gaze upon the work (the 'energia') of Christ on and from the cross, steadfastly identifying on our behalf with the Father, the supreme loving consciousness, and communicating that, instantly and mysteriously to each one of us. We respond with gratitude for the work put before us by our teachers (Benedict's 'School of Love' and the Cloud of Unknowing's 'work of One-ing'). But meditation is our unique opportunity to do this work together. And so our group sat silently in the retreat cottage in the Abbey grounds, letting go of the sounds of the woodpeckers outside, the creak of the heating amplified in the ancient beams of the ceiling and walls, the coughing of our neighbour, our worries about the retreat timetable, the next mealtime, the rest of our lifetime...

And in our meditation, we had the opportunity to experience crucifixion and resurrection with each out-breath and each in-breath. As John Main says, 'In saying the mantra we lay down our life for the sake of the One we have not yet seen'. It is our way to join in the work we have been shown, of loosening our tight grip on who we think we are, and *have* to continue to be, in order to defeat the chaos that we imagine is all around us. It is how we start to do what the rich young man, so eager 'to win eternal life', was not prepared to do. Give up our illusory self-possession, the supposed riches of our ego, which turn out to be just the dead wood of the past, the leavings of the lumber room. This is the practice of spiritual poverty, not the display of a fake humility. It is the loving work of the mantra to lay us low. Becoming no-thing and nobody shrinks (and expands) us to the size of the eye of a needle.

One of our retreat group worked harder than most in the woodshed. He became fascinated by the potential gifts amongst the timber. It seemed as if the proximity of all that piled-high wood had slowed him to its own steady, incremental pace of growth. As I sweated and

heaved at my cross and others looked on or picked up and replaced logs and sticks, I saw him brooding in the corner of the building, sometimes hunching down to the floor, occasionally resting his hand on a piece of wood



to which he was mysteriously drawn. Much later, when I returned to the woodshed, there lay in the spot where he had squatted down on the concrete floor, an entire crucifixion made out of the wood that he had found. A man in the shape of a cross – a cross in the shape of a man. A desiccated bouquet of writhing sticks. He had meant it for the altar at the

other end of the Abbey grounds, but this loose, impermanent arrangement of twigs and branches could not be moved. It had to lie there, where it was conceived and born, on the floor of a farm building.

In the course of the next two days retreatants walked back and forth through the woodshed, many not noticing the sprawled wooden figure in the corner until it was pointed out to them. This gathering and fashioning of fragments from the ego's lumber room was a great gift to us all. A potent reminder that we will find our transformation not in the ascent to airy, spiritual castles, not through the rejection of our ego-self, but from the steady work of loving transformation, *just where we find ourselves*. Yeats said the same thing about the fine poems that he was struggling and failing to write, when he surrendered and (with a telling echo of an essential Benedictine image) gave up climbing ladders the wrong way:

Those masterful images because complete
Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?
A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the ladders start
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

Crucifixion and resurrection are happening all the time. That is the inexpressible – but lived – secret of reality. They are happening especially in all the unregarded places, where we don't notice, we don't look. We need to *see better*. In that figure on the floor we saw the crucifixion of the limited, constructed self that we all hold so dear, and without which we cannot do. By now – a week after Easter – those pieces of wood will have shared in one of the glorious and countless resurrections that Eye Abbey (that Life) everlastingly generates: burning on the gigantic, welcoming log fire of Kate Campbell, the current guardian of the Abbey; swelling the compost that will feed the singing beauty of the gardens through which we danced and so many forgotten monks have processed; or perhaps mending an ancient gate to the Abbey grounds – a gate just about the size of the needle's eye.

Footnote: Eye Abbey in Suffolk, England was one of the earliest Benedictine foundations in the country, having been founded at the end of the 11th century. It was dissolved in 1537. Since 1970 it has been in the keeping of Kate Campbell who is now opening the Abbey to local meditators for retreats and monthly meditation groups.

Jim Green – London, U K
Email: jg@greenjim.co.uk

Novice Oblation

Sitting in the front row of the Lady Goodfellow Chapel at Waikato University, Hamilton, (NZ) waiting for the 6.30 am meditation, I saw what I had been missing during the first three days of the retreat - the delightful view through the window behind the sacred space, a peaceful scene of a little lake surrounded by trees and shrubs. What a lovely start to my special morning! Previously I had chosen a chair near the back which was low enough for me to rest my feet firmly on the ground while meditating, not always easy for one with short legs.

It was the last day of our silent retreat with Father Laurence last February, and the day I had been anticipating for nearly two years, in fact since the previous retreat at St. Cuthbert's College in Auckland in 2007. At that retreat I had sat behind the five oblates making their final oblation and during the ceremony I had become aware that I was being called to make the same commitment. I was reminded of the promise made to me at aged 8, by a nun, that I would receive a vocation. I had never been tempted to enter a convent and thought she had made a mistake, but perhaps this was it, 70 years later!



Prompted by John, one of the oblates, I chased after Stan, the Oblate Coordinator, and registered my request and three months

later I began what turned out to be 18 months as a postulant. Now, the day had arrived for me to make my novice oblation and, after the first meditation and Morning Prayer Father Lawrence led me through the simple ceremony. Surrounded and supported by Hugh and my mentor Diana, and the other oblates, I made my commitment, received the medal of Saint Benedict, a copy of the Rule and signed the Chart.

My faith life has been transformed since I started meditating and is now further enriched daily by the Office, the study of the Rule and John Main's book "Community of Love" all of which will lead me during the last years of my life.

Jane Lys, New Zealand
Email: janelys_7@hotmail.com

'Listen carefully, my child . . .'

Last night the three of us stood outside in the shadow of the Cathedral after meditation, the car park empty of all but three cars, and gone the chatty tourists we'd seen before we went in, with their wandery steps and eyes.

At first, my mind kept flicking away from the conversation to my legs, uncomfortably cold under my jeans, the same way it flicks repeatedly to my watch if I think I'm going to be late. I looked at the others to see if they were cold too, but they were either better covered or deeper in talk. I'd wear longjohns next Tuesday. But suddenly, the scene stopped still for me, saved itself to my hard disc. We were talking about our individual concerns-of-the-moment - which were different for each of us - and listening.

That listening was a particular mixture of elements that seemed to add up to something for which love would be as good a word as any. There was amusement as we listened to one other retorting and declaiming forcefully on the view from our own small spyglass, and there was concern for the hearts we knew lay under the talking heads, hearts we'd come to know over years of shared silence. I realised that, even if briefly, nothing was overriding our listening; there was none of that ear-stopping desire to fix the pain, sort the confusion, shore up indignation by endorsement, cap the story; we were just listening. And when our own turn to speak did come, we knew our words could stamp fiercely down open ears. Each proclamation delivered, the speaker could look trustingly into the eyes of the two listeners, eyes that were also unafraid - and warm - and held the speaker's gaze safely. Maybe we all knew, somehow, in that chilly car park in the deep shadow of columns and domes, that those open eyes and ears were on our side - on the side of the heart of us - whatever foreign fields our minds were currently tramping.

Jane Hole, New Zealand.
Email: holejane66@hotmail.com

Oblate Journey

My Oblate Journey began when I overheard Stan Martin from New Zealand explaining Oblation to an interested participant at the John Main Seminar in Vermont in July 2004.

I had driven my 1926 Model T Ford to the Seminar. Later Stan and I went downtown in the Model T. From that meeting he became my mentor and was very patient and helpful to me as I focused on Conversion, Stability and Obedience. The Model T came out the same year as John Main was born. It also produced my one minute of fame (google: George Browning Hotrod).

Meditation daily and reading the Rule daily keeps me on the path. I marvel at the wisdom, simplicity, usefulness of the 1500 year old Rule of Saint Benedict.

My final oblation took place during our trip to Haiti in December of 2008. Eleven participants immediately bonded as a group as we visited a high school, a college classroom, an orphanage, nursing school, a fishing

village and a hospital. At each location, Father Laurence would describe meditation in French to an eager audience. I did not understand French but I knew the message and could see in questions asked how well the message was received.

The trip over the mountain in a jeep type vehicle gave us time to share stories as we bounced along. This adventure confirmed my belief that I could not be with better companions.

Sharing meditation is a challenge. I have described it to prisoners in our local jail by video phone. I also had a meditation group in the jail with a few interested prisoners. That came to an end when the Sheriff said I will solve the attendance problem by making meditation mandatory. I explained that compulsory meditation was not an option. Meditation can only be undertaken freely. Meditating together does answer the questions.

The excitement of the journey forward as an Oblate comes from the fact that I am constantly beginning anew. We never become experts at loving God and loving our neighbor. It is wonderful to know as an Oblate, I am not on this journey alone but I am sharing this journey with a community of love.

George Browning - Sarasota, Florida USA
Email: modelt3@verizon.net

Silence in the City

**Christian Meditation Retreat
for Younger Meditators (20 – 45yrs)**

with

Fr. Laurence Freeman OSB

August 9 – 14th

LONDON

The retreat will be spent mostly in silence, focused on meditation practice, yoga, walking meditation and times for sharing. Including some visits in the city.

The retreat centre is part of a Benedictine convent in north London which has a large garden, a meeting room, chapel, seventeen single bedrooms and a hermitage in the garden for individual meetings.

Total cost is £225 full board, from the evening of August 9th to after lunch on August 14th.

For those coming from abroad there is a chance to stay longer at the Christian Meditation Retreat Centre in Cockfosters, London.

For more information and to sign-up contact Stefan or Chiara on: ymretreat@yahoo.co.uk

Questions or comments? E-mail us at: retreatcentre@wccm.org or call 0044 (0) 20 8449 1319

Consolation

I did not know
- had no idea -
that in loving you
I would discover
you are loving me
yesterday, today,
tomorrow, now;
and, quite dearly.
Your touch so tender,
your glance consuming,
But never overwhelming -
just there -
if I dare
look up
and meet your gaze of love.

How pathetic my striving,
how foolish my fear
of disappointing you.
You whose name is love.
You are all that is,
and your love -
sweet, gentle,
an abyss of light
cushioning my soul.

In Wisdom's Kitchen, Eileen P. O'Hea, C.S.J. - R.I.P.

Holy Week Retreat - Bere Island, 2009

After the wonderful Holy Week Retreat of meditation, liturgy and the experience of a spontaneous community of love, I'm back in Hobart, though I'm not sure my soul is quite yet! That week and the rest of my journey has been a blessed time of grace and wonder; (there were of course the typical trials of travel and the weaknesses of my aging self!).

I'm now looking forward to catching up with the meditation community in Tasmania and I feel the need to focus on some direction for my role here and to tether my bursting heart which is striving to pierce the cloud of unknowing.

Where and how in my life I asked myself can I realise the outpouring of love that I feel called to by the experience of the community of love on Bere Island?

How can I share the vision of light and the presence of God in that Easter sunrise?

I didn't feel the need to make plans or even discuss what I might strive for. Simply it is enough to carry back the experience and let the spirit work. As I thanked Fr Laurence I said that I'd try to echo what I'd heard and shared.

Well fortunately, the answer is - in the simple practice of this sweetest discipline of meditation and with the solace

of the psalms. In fact a trace of that grace did wash around me as I renewed connections with old friends and family in England and France later. There were many moments filled with the opportunity to love and share and see the difference it does make to speak of love.

The retreat was organised by the young oblates living and working at the Meditation Retreat Centre, Cockfosters. Among the participants were many young meditators from different countries who are actively involved in their meditation communities. I was particularly impressed with how they were putting new technology to that purpose, with all the wonder of the internet, and when I can work out how to, I'll share some of that!

The retreat images and the talks are accessible at www.wccm.org where you will see and hear the spiritual feast and maybe sense my longing for it to last forever.

One very endearing aspect was the inclusion of young children. One young retreatant (aged 6) was Callum Main, Fr John Main's great-nephew; several times he started our sessions by reciting poetry or a verse from Shakespeare.

I also found it very moving participating in the masses at St Michael's Church. I'd say things have moved on a fair way since the first mass Fr Laurence celebrated there, described in 'Jesus the Teacher Within.' I suppose I've a foot in both camps, and I was glad to fuss with the flowers and learn the chorusing hymns with the local choir; and I have to admit to sharing some impatience when it was all being left a bit too much up to the spirit for my liking!

How beautiful though, to squeeze out through the doors with that throng, for the lighting of the fire, all of us pressing in to see the lighting of the Pascal Candle in the cold inky night. And how tender the washing of feet in canon, how surprised and moved was I when one fellow meditator planted a kiss on my foot to finish.

At the end of the Easter Vigil we thanked the local faith community for their hospitality with a song; Leonard Cohen's Hallelujah; the cantors, Debbie one of our group and Mimi, a child of the island, both had voices of angels. Then the island children sang in return in Gaelic.

Apart from just being there, my own participation included taking the morning exercise for the retreat as the yoga teacher was unable to attend. I led us in Qi Gong instead, which was well-received and good for our backs! And I got the job of driving; including reversing cars on to the tiny 5-car ferry. Very scary.

In Admiral House, a big house set up for groups to hire, we shared community and held our meditation and Morning Prayer sessions. We also set aside a cosy lounge with an open fire for any who wished to keep the silence. We went to the talks and main meditation sessions at the new 'Heritage Centre' the former school house (which is coming to be known as the Meditation Centre). There were walks to the cliffs, the lighthouse,

the standing stone and the towering cross on the highest point on the island.

The weather was mixed but wonderful for Easter Morning, when we walked up to the standing stone at Greenane before dawn. The ancient stone is paired by the huge cross on the next hilltop. We heard the first half of scripture, read by the youngest of the retreatants and waited with the anguish of Jesus' death for the sun to rise and the readings of the resurrection by the oldest among us. We waited, and watched the moon go down and waited... and watched the morning star fade... and waited ... able to feel, standing there in the cold dawn, that it took an ancient faith to make that sun rise again. Then, the beatitude on the faces of those who had kept vigil, lit up blinking in the golden light.



Returning to mass at St Joseph's Church in Hobart, on the Fourth Sunday of Easter, the words that held my focus were those of the shepherd who also seeks out the sheep outside the fold. I think that our little community here, in light of the vision of Fr. John and Fr. Laurence reaches out and makes possible that enfolding in a very significant way.

May we all play our part in bringing the fruits of meditation to the particular communities of each of our lives. For now perhaps I just need to meditate!

Danielle Pacaud, Tasmania
Email: danipacaud@iprimus.com.au

An Oblate's Spiritual Journey

When I started meditation a few years ago, I never thought I would have an opportunity to enter into an oblate community in which all members practice the daily discipline of meditation. Though I already knew there was a meditation centre located in London which had been established many years ago, I was not able to start a physical relationship with it until one day with great joy and surprising I was invited by Fr. Laurence, through the national coordinator Liz King, to join the London oblate community for one year. This invitation was just like Jesus' invitation to the two disciples of John the Baptist, "Come and see," so they went and saw where he lived, and stayed with him that day. (Jn. 1:39).

Three months have passed since my arrival on New Year's Day and I was received as an oblate novice on 1st

February. I was given a copy of the Rule of Saint Benedict to read and reflect on daily and a mentor was assigned to me. For an oblate's spiritual formation, the group's thrice daily periods of meditation are stable and indispensable. With all this spiritual assistance, I trust that I will grow spiritually day after day.

I know it is not always easy to live in community. All the people who are a part of this spiritual community are only human. Often when we try our best to live a higher spiritual or divine life, our human part will become heavier and more unbearable. Just like Jesus said, "the spirit is willing enough, but human nature is weak" (Mk 14:38).

Personally, I think to be patient with myself is the prerequisite to accepting my natural imperfections. Once I can completely accept my whole and undivided being, I can really begin to appreciate my wonderful and unique gifts in life. And the more I can appreciate and accept myself, then the more I can appreciate others' different gifts and accept them as they are, as well. Gradually, when each one in the community looks at each other with these eyes, the community cannot but help build up an unshakable foundation for their continuing growth and transformation.

But this is easier said than done and the beginning of each work is always the most difficult. Learning to be patient is a good start for me on this pilgrimage from self to others as I learn this oblate way of life.

Tony Hu Yan Bo - CMRC, Cockfosters.
huyanbobo@yahoo.com.cn

Saint Bernardo Tolomei

1272 - 1348



Through searching the web for information on Bl. Bernardo, I read his life story, but I would like to learn more about his spirituality and writings. Apparently there are only forty-eight letters and a homily that remain.

Giovanni, as he was known in his early years, left a more than comfortable lifestyle and family of wealth and influence in 1313 for an ascetic life at Accona with his two companions Patrizio di Francesco Patrizi and Ambrogio di Nino Piccolomini. It was there that they lived a penitential life as hermits, characterised by prayer,

manual work and silence and became monks according to the Rule of Benedict. At that time Giovanni took a new name, and placed himself under the patronage of the great monk and abbot, Bernard of Clairvaux.

As the day approached to leave for the Canonisation, one by one the other three oblates who were going, emailed me to say that because of ill health, work, it was not possible for them to go. And so I set out for this once in a lifetime experience.

All of our oblate communities had been contacted and the responses were very encouraging to know that around the world, in small groups or alone, they and others were meditating at some time during the prayer vigil at St. Francesca Romana and/or during the Canonisation.

The hospitality of the Italian meditators was particularly generous and mindful. The day I arrived I was phoned to see if I would like to join the meditation group that evening, which I did and a few of us enjoyed dinner afterwards. This hospitality continued throughout my stay.

There was an atmosphere of excitement at Sta Francesca Romana on the evening prior to the prayer vigil as friendships were renewed and introductions made. Fr. Laurence introduced me as representing our oblates, to the Abbot General, Most Reverend Dom Michelangelo Tiribilli OSB. An honour for our community, even though brief.

As I sat and look around before the prayer commenced (in Italian) strong memories of the 6th April, 2008, came flooding back. This was the day, during the oblate retreat-pilgrimage, that we celebrated Eucharist in this basilica and Pauline made her final oblation. As the prayer started I strongly felt the presence of our global community, meditating and sharing in the web of silence that unites us all in the Spirit.

On Sunday 26th April, the day dawned on a cloudy, rainy cold morning, with the sun breaking through in patches. Along with Fr. Laurence I was taken to the Vatican and shown to a seat in the top area of the Piazza San Pietro. The Abbot General had asked Fr. Laurence to distribute Holy Communion and he was among the 50 or so priests and monks, seated together, not far from where I sat with some of the Olivetan monks and nuns.

As the people gathered, the dignitaries wearing their various medals and regalia filed in. It was spectacular, like nothing I had ever witnessed. The rain came in showers at first then we could put our umbrellas away. Fr. Laurence wrote eloquently about the Canonisation in the Tablet and this was sent to all The WCCM coordinators. (I can email copies if needed.)

The ceremony commenced with the presentation of the five Postulators to Benedict XVI seated on the elevated *cathedra*. Each one in turn walked up to the Pope and from where I sat seemed to have an informal conversation. The Postulator for Bl. Bernardo was Sylvestrine monk Fr. Reginaldo Gregorie. In an article from "Zenit" Fr. Gregorie said of Saint Bernardo's

writings: "They allow one to perceive his humility, his sensitivity, his ecclesial and communitarian spirit, and his knowledge of sacred Scripture."

As the next step commenced we were reminded that we were gathered in prayer to participate in the solemn Canonisation and to listen to some thoughts left to us by the five 'Blesseds' being canonised, to reflect on them and pray to God, expressing our joy and gratitude for the example of their lives.

Below are some 'thoughts' on Saint Bernardo and one of his writings taken from the Booklet – "CANONIZZAZIONE Piazza San Pietro, 26 Aprile 2009"

"Bernardo left his monks an example of a holy life, the practice of the virtues to a heroic level, an existence dedicated to the service of others and to contemplation..... This hero of penance and martyr of charity did not go by unnoticed...."

"Every action of the soul and body of those who act, if submissive to the Spirit and faithful to its goal, becomes sweet. Who can doubt in fact, that God in the fullness of His power holds all things, and from whose hand all good comes? And to whom will the most wise Dispenser distribute good if not to those on whom the Spirit rests, that is the humble, the peaceful, and those who fear His words? And so, who today would want to delight in the flesh, the world and all it contains? Those who desire, in the future, to benefit from the fruits of the eternal reward should adhere to Christ, who gives generously without humiliating those who receive; and who, with humble resolution and constancy, do their utmost to direct themselves, all they have, and all they will ever possess, towards such a great Lord, and will receive a good recompense from Him. All you have, be it yourself, be it every thing, give it, placing yourself and every thing according to His most holy Will."

Then we prayed:

*O God, who by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit,
have called in solitude*

*Blessed Bernardo Tolomei and his companions,
to serve you through persevering prayer
and fervent communion of life;*

*guide us so that we imitate their example
and persevere with ardour in the service
of your praise and in brotherly charity.*

For Christ our Lord.

There was an atmosphere of great joy, and camaraderie and as each new Saint was named the cries of delight and thanksgiving rippled around St. Peter's Square as flags and banners were waved energetically.

The celebration of Eucharist followed with the Introductory Rites and the Rite of Canonisation, sung in Latin. This called forth my school girl Latin, and a part

of me was glad that we had learnt the responses to the Mass and the prayers in this 'dead' language all those years ago. How progressive were those Sisters who taught us in an all girl's school!

In the Introduction to the (English language) booklet *Saint Bernard Tolomei, Founder of the Benedictine Congregation of St. Mary of Monte Oliveto* the Abbot General ended with - "St. Bernard Tolomei [is] a figure who bears not only the flavour of the past but something of the freshness of things new. His particular witness to monastic life is surely of contemporary relevance."

As we come to celebrate Saint Bernardo Tolomei's Feast day on 19th August, it would be a great gift to have some excerpts from his writings for the Readings on that day.

Trish Panton, Benedictine Oblate Coordinator
Email: pantonamdg@ozemail.com.au

The Brisbane (Australia) Oblate Cell

The Brisbane Oblate Cell was off to a good start with its first meeting for the year in January. This small but faithful group that started a few years ago meeting irregularly, is now growing and marked its growth with the commitment of three new Postulants at the January meeting. As always, the energy, the openness and the trust of new meditators seeking the oblate path within community is food for the journey for all.



Left to Right: Gloria Duffy, Beulah Cox, Gerry Moloney

In quietness and in trust shall be your strength Isa. 30:15b NRSV

The path of Christian meditation leads us to a place of silence in which we are joined with the Spirit of Jesus already praying in us. Each time we enter the practice of Christian meditation, we release ourselves in loving faith to the Divine Other, entrusting ourselves to Divine Abundance in an act that is self-emptying. This response of self-forgetful love (not to be confused with self-rejection) corresponds to the desire of Divine Love to have us participate in the fullness of its own life.

Woman: Her Intuition for Otherness,

Eileen P. O'Hea, C.S.J., P.63

Remembering Jan Bowman

Jan Bowman, esteemed Southern California Meditation Group Leader, Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Thousand Oaks, CA, died on her 69th birthday, Monday, Feb. 16, at her home in Thousand Oaks. At CLU, Bowman also developed courses in integrated, global and women's studies."

Jan wrote the following: "The morning after I received the diagnosis, I opened "Psalms for Praying" to Psalm 16, which I intend to read every day that I am able to do so:

Remain ever before me, /O living Presence, / for in You am I safe.

You are my Beloved; in You I can do all things. I look to those who are at one with You and learn from them of your ways; /My delight increases each time I sense your presence within me! /Songs of praise well up from my heart!

Love is my chosen food, my cup, /holding me in its power. /Where I have come from, /

Where're I shall go, Love is my birthright, /my true estate.

I bless the Counselor who guides my way; /in the night also does my heart instruct me.

I walk beside the Spirit of Truth; I celebrate the Light. Thus my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; /I shall not be afraid, /nor fall into the pit of despair;

In Love's presence there is fullness of joy.

You are my Beloved; in You will I live.

As the psalmist says, "I look to those who are at one with You and learn from them of your ways."



Left to right: Larry Johnson, Sally Johnson, Jan Bowman, Jan's husband Gerry Swanson, Pat Mitchell, Lynn Dempsey. Center: (photographed from behind) Mary Valiquette.

Thank you to Lucy Palermino for contributing this tribute to Jan and the photo.
Email: Owisdom1@aol.com

"The journey of prayer is both sublime and ordinary. The ordinariness of regular daily practice and community encouragement become the context for God's sublime revelation. An important part of this ordinariness is meditation in common.....It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this physical and spiritual being together. Shared silence is a self-authenticating faith in God's presence among us. Learning to meditate in common is the greatest of our exercises of communal love. In these moments we hold open with and to others the most precious part of ourselves – the heart where our treasure also is, our faith in the presence of Jesus." *Monastery without Walls, p. 29*

FROM the EDITOR

This has been a full year to date with the Canonisation and the School Retreat, in each of these there were graced moments and experiences to continue savoring in the days ahead.

Ross Miller, Oblate Coordinator for New Zealand has retired. We thank Ross, for his work in guiding the community and wish him and his wife Mary well in their retirement to their new home in the north. We welcome Hugh McLaughlin as the new Oblate Coordinator and wish him many blessings in this role.

The JMS09 will be held in London and if you are going could you let me know, as it would be good to arrange a meeting sometime during the Seminar.

I am sure I speak for all in expressing my gratitude to Fr. Laurence for his guidance and willingness to give of himself so generously in many ways. In October he will be presenting a conference at the Second World Congress for Benedictine Oblates in Rome.

A sincere thank you to all who contributed to this issue of Via Vitae with articles and photos. They give us an appreciation of what is happening for the contributors as well as in our various communities around the world. A special thank you to Leon who designs the lay out moves articles around to ready for converting to pdf and is so patient in doing so.

*God guides the docile in their thinking.
He instructs the meek in his ways.*

From Benedictine Daily Prayer p. 1029

With love and prayer, Trish

"There is no growth in consciousness, or growth in the Spirit until we have begun to cut loose from self-consciousness. The vital question is, 'How do we do it?' The simple answer is, 'say your mantra'. To meditate you don't have to be clever or wise or perceptive, only serious enough to begin and then humble enough to continue."

Light Within, Laurence Freeman OSB, p.83



BOOK CORNER

Bede Griffiths : The New Creation in Christ. Meditation and Community.

A Book Review:

This book is important for Oblates of The WCCM because of its subject, its occasion and its author. As to subject the first two chapters speak for themselves: 'The Monastic Ideal According to John Main' and 'The Extension of the Monastic Ideal to the Laity' and goes on to look at 'The Future of the Contemplative Life in the Church'. Fr. Bede encourages the growth of small lay communities and meditation groups drawing from monastic wisdom but independent, recovering the simplicity of the early church. As to the occasion, the book is an edited transcript of the talks given by Fr Bede at the 1991 John Main Seminar in New Harmony Indiana where, as Fr Laurence explains in his Introduction, The WCCM took "its first form and structure". If John Main can be seen as the founding father of The WCCM Fr Bede was its God-father at this moment of naming and orientation. As to the author, Fr Bede was a Benedictine monk who witnessed to a contemplative meeting, even marriage, of East and West. In these talks he highlights the influence another monastic prophet had on his integrative vision. From the beginning this book is rightly generous in its appreciation of John Main.

For these reasons it is a book worth returning to many times and is in many ways a sequel to 'Monastery Without Walls' as a description of how The WCCM developed from the teaching on meditation John Main rediscovered. Fr Bede was a scholar and a mystic which can be seen in his careful study of John Main's teaching. He was also a prophet who saw the contemplative renewal within the church coming from the laity. He also saw it as a fruit of the encounter of the world religions. He draws attention to the fact that John Main's recovery of mantra meditation for Christians came from his study of the monastic tradition of prayer but also his encounter with an Indian monk witnessing to the less obscured contemplative wisdom of the East. Fr Bede sees John Main's teaching as the fruit of open mindedness and depth, an integrative vision which, actualised in the practice of meditation is what the world needs so much today.

There are many gems of wisdom in the book like the story of Father Jules Monchanin, founder of Fr Bede's Ashram in India who, Fr Bede says; "approached a group of school children and asked them, 'Where is God?' The Hindu children pointed to the heart and said God was there. The Christians pointed up to the sky." Fr Bede comments: "These are two different ways of understanding God and of course they are complementary; we are all learning today how to reconcile opposites." It is this experience of non-duality

that Fr Bede sees at the heart of meditation; God is in us and we are in God. For the Christian, Fr Bede says, this integration is lived out in human relationships. Oneness with God leads to oneness with others. Jesus prayed in the spirit to his Father; "I in them and you in me, may they be completely one." (Jn. 17:23). Like John Main, Fr Bede sees the non-duality of the Trinity through analogy to the interpersonal communion that it makes possible: "I think that love is the key. In love, there are two, and each has to go beyond the other. They have to transcend their differences and meet at the point where they become one."

Fr Bede and John Main met a couple of times and, as Fr Laurence says in this introduction to the book, the fruit of those meetings was a sense of joy and laughter. Here were two very different people, whose monastic journeys took them away from England (no prophet is accepted in their own household?) in opposite directions and yet they discovered the same thing. As Oblates of The World Community in all parts of the world we are heirs of their wisdom. As a foundation document 'New Creation in Christ' reminds us of our commitment as Oblates to study John Main's teaching and the monastic tradition from which it comes so as to serve the unity of all. It still challenges us today to try to realise that vision through the openness and hospitality of our meditation groups and the community of our Oblate cells. Alongside the book are the original tapes and CD's of the John Main Seminar which are available and bring to life Fr Bede's inimitable charm, his humility and his humour. Either as Audio or as Lectio these are the conferences of a founding father of a community and vision to which we are continually recommitted in our daily meditation.

Stefan Reynolds, U K
Email: stefandreynolds@yahoo.co.uk

LIGHT WITHIN Meditation as Pure Prayer Laurence Freeman OSB

This latest edition was published in 2008 by Canterbury Press Norwich.

In *Light Within* Laurence Freeman has written an enduring contemporary classic of this desert tradition adapted to the spiritual hunger and needs of our time. He indicates the support of spiritual friendship that helps many to continue to deepen this inner journey through a worldwide community that has grown out of this practice over the past thirty years. It is a fresh, appealing yet challenging teaching and vision. At a time when so many religious divisions cut across Christianity, other faiths and global society, this book offers real – and well-grounded – hope. "There is no simpler proof of goodwill", the author writes, "than to meditate with a person you disagree with ... because there is a level of experience open to us all where differences cease to be divisive."

OBLATE COORDINATORS

U.S.A.: Greg Ryan
Email: gjryan@optonline.net

U.K.: Eileen Dutt
Email: eileendutt@yahoo.co.uk

NEW ZEALAND: Hugh McLaughlin
Email: hungnz1916@yahoo.com

ITALY: Devis Maccarelli
Email: macdev@tiscali.it

IRELAND: Rowena O'Sullivan
Email: rowenaos@gmail.com

CANADA: Don Myrick
Email: tdmyrick@magma.ca

BRAZIL: Carlos Siqueira
Email: wccm@uol.com.br

AUSTRALIA and INTERNATIONAL:
Trish Panton
Email: pantonamdg@ozemail.com.au

**Please notify the Oblate
Coordinator in your country if you have changed
any of your contact details.**

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EDITOR:

Trish Panton
P.O. Box 555
Pennant Hills, NSW
Australia 1715

Tel +61 2 9489 1780
Mobile: 0409 941 605
Email: pantonamdg@ozemail.com.au

AUSTRALIAN DESIGN:

Leon Milroy
PO Box 246
Uralla NSW 2358
Email: leon.milroy@gmail.com

Visit the Community's Website at:
<http://www.wccm.org>
Be sure to visit the Oblate pages
recently updated by Greg Ryan.

Australia's Website is on
<http://www.christianmeditationaustralia.org>

"What is at stake for Christianity is the authenticity of the witness we make to the presence of Christ. If our prayer is not deeply centred in that love and if our lives are not centred in our prayer, how can our lives and work be rooted in him?"

Monastery Without Walls, p. 30

CONTACT DETAILS

Each oblate coordinator or their delegate does their utmost to keep accurate records of their respective oblate communities. It is so disheartening when emails are returned and even more so when copies of Via Vitae are 'returned to sender'.

All we ask is, could you please inform your oblate coordinator, listed above, if there are any changes to your contact details. If you do this by email, could you please cc to me as I am endeavouring to maintain the international oblate database. For those not connected to the internet, perhaps you could ask someone from the community to send an email on your behalf if you do not have the phone number or postal address of your coordinator.

In our monastery without walls, it is essential to keep connected. Please spare a minute or two to ensure that your contact details are up to date.....Trish

MISSING in the USA

Daley/Dailey, Patricia - ?
Davis, Gena - TX
Falter, Maria - CA
Feltz, Rose Ann - WI
Finnigan, Tom - CA
Gibson, Edith - ?
Picard, Michelle - MN
Rice, Velma - TX
Whitney, Jason - ?

If you know any of the above, could you contact either the person, or the oblate coordinator with cc to Mary Robison. Mary is from New Hampshire and has generously volunteered to assist Greg Ryan by maintaining the US database and mailing Via Vitae. Mary's email is: maryrobison@mac.com