

Live out the *Rule* in relationship to our possessions

The *Rule* teaches us that in the Distribution of Goods, “Distribution was made to each one as there was need” (RB 34-1, Acts 4:35). It does not forbid ownership, but it implies moderation and the distribution of excess.

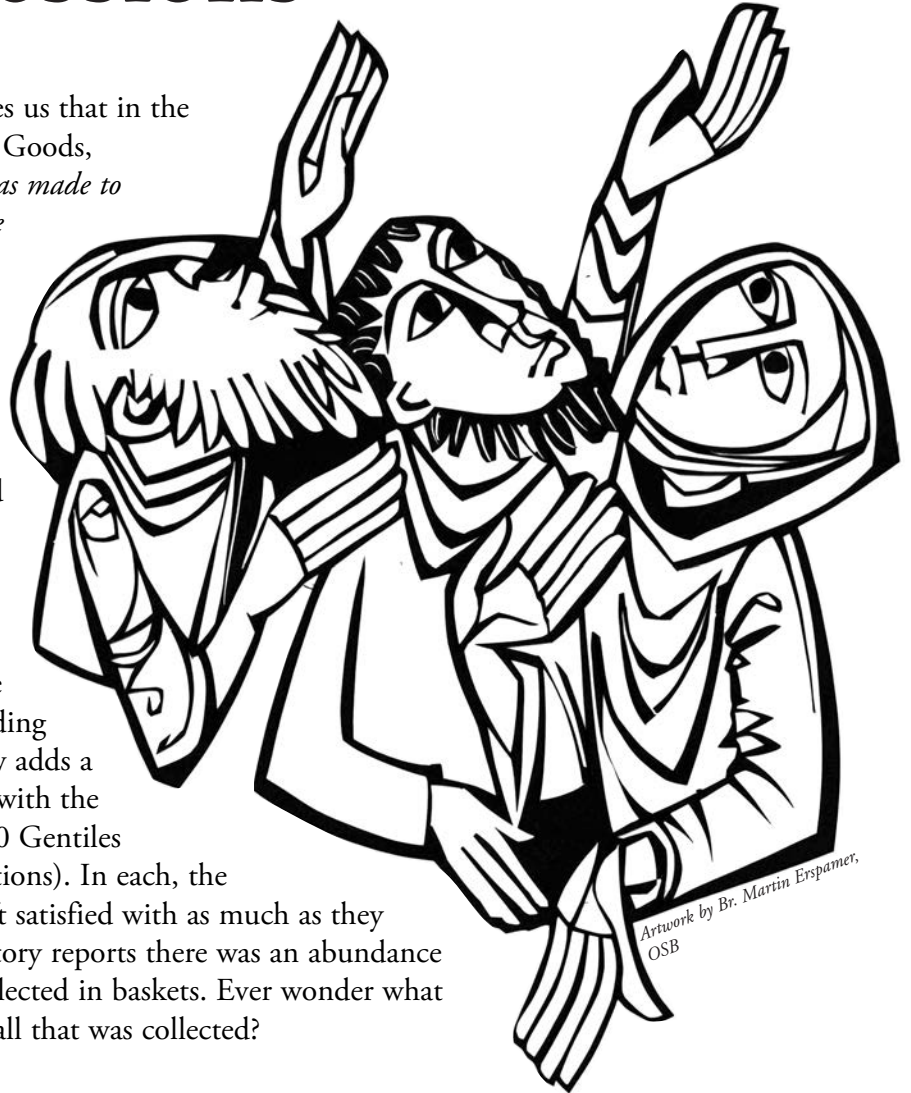
All four Gospels include the story of feeding 5,000. Matthew adds a second version with the feeding of 4,000 Gentiles (The goyim/nations). In each, the crowds were left satisfied with as much as they wanted. Each story reports there was an abundance of left-overs collected in baskets. Ever wonder what was done with all that was collected?

Speaking of collecting baskets, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar sold four championship rings, three MVP trophies and other memorabilia for \$2.8 million. Proceeds from the sale went to a youth education program.

The NBA Hall of Famer said, “When it comes to choosing between storing a championship ring or trophy in a room or providing kids with an opportunity to change their lives, the choice is pretty simple: sell it all.”

This issue will focus on the manner in which we, as oblates, live out the *Rule* in relationship to our possessions.

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate
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A POINT TO PONDER FROM *The Rule*

“It is written, *Distribution was made to each one as they had need* (Acts 4:35). We do not imply by this that there should be favoritism, God forbid, but rather concern for weaknesses. Whoever needs less should thank God and not be sad, but whoever needs more should feel humble because of weakness and not self-important over the mercy shown. Thus, all the members will be at peace.”

(The Rule of St. Benedict, Chapter 34: 1-5)

Benedictine Oblate Quarterly is published four times a year by Saint Meinrad Archabbey.

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One Size Fits All—not!



Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB

Shoes, shirts, trousers, dresses, sweaters. “What size fits us best?” we ask, as we consider the options in front of us.

St. Benedict would ask a slightly different question.

Benedict was not a slob. Nor did he want his monks to look like slob. Writing in Chapter 55, he insists that “the abbot ought to be concerned about the measurements of [the monks’ habits] that they not be too short but fitted to the wearers (v. 8). Later is there perhaps a slight hint he might even have some concern for a neat appearance? “Brothers going [away from the monastery, out into the public]... their cowls and tunics...ought to be somewhat better than those they ordinarily wear” (v. 13-14).

When it comes to the clothes, books, or other possessions a monk may have, Benedict is not concerned about the color or the shape of things, nor about society’s latest styles. His concerns are two. First, does the monk have enough to meet his needs? Second, does the monk have more than he needs?

Our custom at Saint Meinrad is that the abbot visits each monk’s cell during Lent. This is not to detect contraband, as might be the case in military or boarding schools. Rather, my impending visit hopefully gives each of my confreres a little extra incentive to take stock of his room and his things, to judge what is excess and not really needed, and then to reduce his leftover inventory by trashing it or contributing it to someone who needs it more.

Benedict knows quite well that all monks are not created equally, and therefore, they must not be treated the same. I’m sure he would claim that “what’s good for the goose is not necessarily good for the gander.” What the goose has may well be too much—or not enough—for the gander.

Benedict sees such decisions—such discernment—as gestures of care and respect on the abbot’s part. And so in Chapter 2, he sets out one of his most important instructions to the abbot. He’s concerned here with our most private possession: our behavior. And so, “[the abbot] must so arrange everything that the strong have something to yearn for and the weak nothing to run from” (v. 19).

*Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB
Saint Meinrad Archabbey*



James Sigler is invested as an oblate novice by Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB, in a ceremony in the Archabbey Church on June 3, 2023.

On the Distribution of Goods



Janis Dopp

I remember many years ago, one monk told a group of us that, for his Solemn Profession, he had been gifted with a set of golf clubs by a member of his family. He

reminded us of what was written in the *Rule*: “No one should presume to have anything of his own, nothing at all—neither book nor tablet nor pen—indeed nothing at all, since they are not even free to have control either of their bodies or of their own will... and anything that the abbot has not given or permitted they are not free to have” (RB 34:3-5). He presented the golf clubs to his abbot, who thanked him for them. They were then given to someone else.

I suspect that this would be too rigorous an expectation for the average layperson. We are used to accumulating goods and even take pride in what we have. As oblates we

live according to the “Spirit of the *Rule*”—not the *Rule* itself. We do not have to ask permission to purchase or possess anything we desire. So, how do we adapt this part of the *Rule* to our daily lives?

One monk once told me that whenever he receives permission to keep something that he has been gifted with, he first gives away something like it. In the monastery, they have the “Rage Shelf.” This is where the monks place items they will no longer use so that another member of the community can take them. While I don’t have a Rage Shelf at home—in which case I would only be releasing items to myself—there is Goodwill, the Salvation Army, and the homeless shelters. In all these places, what I am willing to let go of, rather than having it sit in my closet or cupboards, will benefit someone else who is in need.

“It is written: *Distribution was made to each one as he had need* (Acts 4:35). Whoever needs less should thank God and not be distressed, but whoever

needs more should feel humble because of his weakness, not self-important because of the kindness shown him” (RB 34:1-4).

It is very difficult for me to separate “need” from “want.” It is far too easy to convince myself that I really do need something when so much of what I already have will certainly take care of that need. Our built-in consumer mentality is with us every step of the way to bludgeon our efforts to use less, to make do with what we already have, to be satisfied with our mended trench coat instead of running out to purchase something new.

It’s the little things we do that help us change our lives. *Conversatio* is seen in the choices we make. If I can let go of that fifth frying pan, maybe I can also let go of some of my not-so-great tendencies. St. Benedict teaches us about living life in a way that edifies, not just ourselves, but the world around us on our way to heaven. Possessions are temporary. Eternal life is forever.

Janis Dopp
Oblate Director

Distribution of goods: Pay attention to actual needs



Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB

“That’s not fair!” Perhaps as children we said this when we thought someone else was getting more than us. “That’s not fair!” Even as adults, we may say this.

according to need. St. Benedict is interested in determining what each monk really needs, and what gifts of abstinence each monk has. In order to keep peace in the community, St. Benedict says, “...one who needs less should thank God and not be sad. And whoever needs more should be humble about his weaknesses and not gloat over the mercy shown him.”

cause murmuring. It is important that the abbot not be influenced by murmuring, but rather should, as St. Benedict says, “...pay attention to the weaknesses of the needy and not the bad will of the envious” (RB 55:21).

If monks have what they need, then they don’t need to be upset by apparent favoritism given to other monks. So, envy, and then what

Chapter 34 of the *Rule of St. Benedict* concerns the distribution of goods

If monks compare their benefits with other monks in the community, it can

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follows, murmuring, are prevented through attention to the actual needs of each monk. This is for the abbot to watch, but each monk in the community needs to look at his own true personal needs so that he does not want something just because it was given to someone else.

Compared to most of the world, we live in a wealthy society. It is easy to take things for granted and become presumptuous, spoiled, and smug. Although we have much, it is easy to say, "I want a bit more." When preparing to buy something, let's ask ourselves, "Do I really need this, or do

I just want it?" If the destitute and starving of the world could see what we in this country consume, as well as throw away, perhaps they would say, "That's not fair!"

Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB
Oblate Chaplain

Notes for Novices: Love counteracts selfishness and social division



Br. Gregory Morris

"No one should presume to have anything of his own." (RB 33:4)

Newcomers to the *Rule of St. Benedict* often recoil at admonitions against laughter,

strict obedience to senior monks and superiors, and corporal punishment for seemingly minor faults. However, the warning against private ownership hits closer to home than we realize.

Historically, St. Benedict follows his monastic forebears, namely John Cassian and St. Basil the Great, seeing private ownership as breeding social

division within the monastery. Such strictures against possessions might seem excessive, so we might gloss over the text, shrug our shoulders, and move on to more "moderate" passages in the *Rule*.

However, the vice of avarice is more than just having too many possessions. It's a symptom of selfishness that cuts across our social interactions. We become possessive of our time, self-isolating through rampant social media usage, clinging to illusive and self-destructive ideologies, ultimately deafening our spiritual senses by claiming an illusion of unrestrained autonomy.

Simply put, we no longer encounter Christ amidst our endless cycles of narcissistic self-imaging. That sense of

self-sufficiency is exactly what St. Benedict seeks to curtail.

St. Benedict sees humility, hospitality, and good zeal as the foundational aspects of the monastic esprit de corps, vital to the flourishing of the Benedictine way of life. Our given assumptions of productivity, economy, and politics desperately need to be transposed by the light of the Gospel, grounded on the voice of the Lord that St. Benedict bids each of us to follow without recourse to our self-sufficiency.

Love alone is the only measure by which we learn to be less possessive and more charitable to another.

Br. Gregory Morris, OSB
Oblate Novice Mentor

Chapter 34 of the *Rule Book*



Mark Plaiss

Chapter 34 of the RB riffs off Acts 4:35 regarding distribution of goods according to need. Fine.

However, no one should blow over

RB 34:5 that simply states, "In this way [distribution of goods according to need] all the members will be at peace." That's the reason the goods are distributed in such a manner! Keep the peace in the monastery!

Oblates don't live in a monastery. We own property, save and enjoy wealth,

and hopefully leave something for our children. At first glance, the idea of distribution of goods according to need may seem antithetical to our way of life. I suggest the key to RB 34 is verse 5: "members will be at peace."

Husband, wife and children-a family-need the same thing monks need in a

monastery: peace. And one means of establishing such peace is having enough wealth to sustain the family. Wealth is not the only way to sustain peace in the family, but it is one way. Poverty is not in the cards for Mr. and Mrs. Smith and family.

Wealth is not limited to money. People are endowed with all kinds of wealth: the wealth of charity, encouragement, concern, empathy and hope abound. I know a person who, when she spots an armed force veteran (by the cap they are wearing) simply walks up to that person,

complete strangers, and says, “Thank you for your service.” The veteran is so grateful! I would bet that her expressed gratitude brings a measure of peace to the veteran as well. She once expressed her gratitude to a gentleman wearing a cap saying he was a Vietnam War veteran. His response to her act of gratitude? “Thank you. I was spit upon when I came home.” Cannot virtues such as hers be wealth, too?

“Distribution of Goods According to Need,” says the heading for Chapter 34. “Need.” People need not only our

monetary charity, but the charity of our hearts, too. Give what you have to those who need it. Distribute God’s goodness. Doing so brings about peace.

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The Oblate Toolbox

Distribution of goods: sharing and receiving

“Whatever you have left over, give away as alms; and do not let your eye begrudge the alms that you give.” —Tobit 4:16.



Angie McDonald

Some time ago, I was challenged to clean out surplus possessions from home and either donate, recycle, keep, or toss them. Every day of the month, I added to the pile: Day 1, one item;

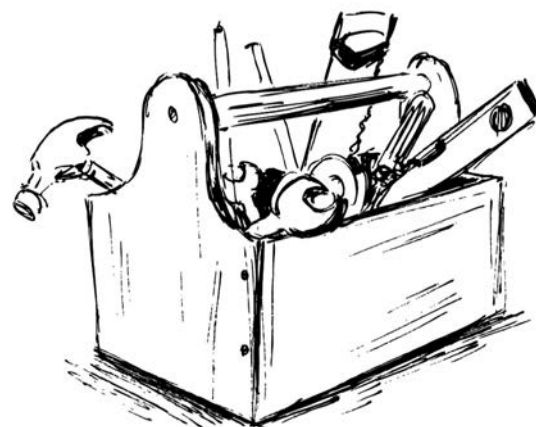
Day 2, two items, etc. On Day 30, there were to have been 30 items, plus all the others added up from all the other days to unload.

This approach was quite a lot of fun while also making me think: what did I have that someone else could use? Did I really need all this stuff? Or was

I being stingy about what God had given me, holding on to it with a death grip instead of releasing it to share with others?

A periodic purge, such as this, can help us evaluate our attitude toward our material possessions. As seen from Tobit, hoarding things is not exactly a path to follow. When storage units abound to house the belongings that don’t fit inside homes, it may be time to shed those things.

Perhaps we wouldn’t have so much to purge if we did it more regularly. Maybe we really don’t need two blenders. Perhaps we could donate the books and clothes we no longer read or wear and give others a chance to enjoy them.



On the other side of the coin, I have been so blessed by the generosity of others who gave away their surplus. I have found clothes for pennies on the dollar at our local thrift store, items I never could have afforded at full price. I am so thankful to those who donated them for others.

The distribution of goods then appears to have two sides: sharing with those who have a need and receiving from others to fill a need. It is a beautiful partnership which blesses both the giver and the receiver.

*Angie McDonald, oblate
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Always to Look Beyond



*Diane Frances
Walter*

At sunrise, I got up and took care of the animals, feeding the ducks, donkeys, and dogs. I checked wings, feet, feathers, hooves, and fur for health. I gave extra water because it was a hotter day. From there, I checked my garden, fertilizing and weeding, pruning and harvesting.

After lunch, my family invited me to a card game. We followed the rules, and the same number of cards were doled out equally to each. We began the game by relying on luck of the draw to see who would win and when most of us would lose.

Later, it struck me how even outside the *Rule of St. Benedict*, we talk so much about rules. It is often said in our culture that people who fail at aspects of life are not following the rules. Even outside of sports, it is often said that people should play by the rulebook. I realized that taking care of the farm and playing card games were not opposing activities. Both required some rules and expectations.

However, both events were differently spirited. In the morning, I was concerned that my animals and gardens had what they needed. In the afternoon, we were concerned that everyone at the table had equal cards in hand, and with that distribution, the same chance of winning or losing.

What is interesting about what St. Benedict has left us in his *Rule* is that it appears he was concerned about how easy it is for humanity to lean on games of chance rather than on the

effort it can take to employ genuine care and concern. All throughout his text, he notes the special care needed for just about every matter, from prayer to readings, from how to live and relate, and even things we may take for granted, like food or distribution of goods.

In Saint Meinrad's recently released translation of the *Rule of St. Benedict*, Chapter 34 is titled "Whether All Without Distinction Should Receive What Is Necessary." The title invites a great question: Can one follow the *Rule* and still provide people what is needed to flourish? St. Benedict then wrote:

"As it is written: *Distribution was made to each one as there was need* (Acts 4:35).

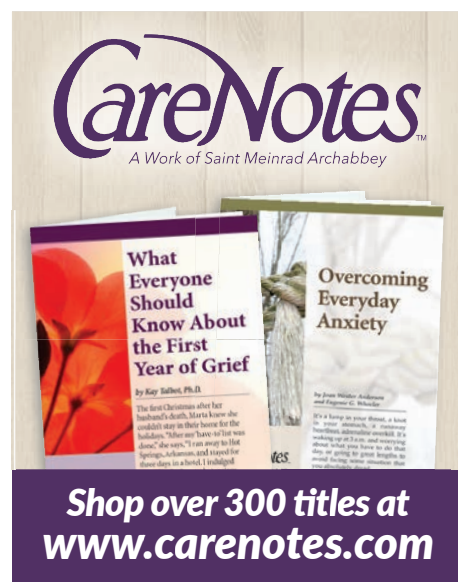
By this, we do not mean to say that there should be favorites, God forbid; however, there should be a consideration for weaknesses. When one needs less, let him give thanks to God and not be sad. However, when one needs more, let him be humbled by his weakness and not become self-important because of the mercy shown to him, and so all the members will be at peace" (RB 34:1-5).

St. Benedict reiterates from previous chapters that there should be no favorites, while still allowing consideration for weaknesses. From here, you will notice he then turns to the relational aspect of his *Rule*, pointing us to prayerful dispositions. Those who need less are to be grateful to God and not be sad. Those who need more are to be humbled, recognizing mercy and not to become self-consumed. The call is always to look beyond oneself.

That is the beauty of what St. Benedict put down on paper as a roadmap for monastic life. It is not about winning a game. His way of life points instead to healthy, holy relationships with God and with others. We can follow the *Rule of St. Benedict* and still strengthen the strong to gratitude and strengthen the weak with care. He replaces competition and favoritism with necessity and nurturing. He insinuates that at some point in our lives, we will all succumb to some sort of weakness, and we will all experience some type of strength.

For oblates, this entry of the *Rule* matters much. We face our families, co-workers, neighbors, even animals and plants with daily care and concern. Can we give what is needed without distinction? Likewise, can we receive with dispositions of grace and gratitude in our own strengths and weaknesses? Peace is the aim, according to St. Benedict, and it can be received by all.

*Diane Frances Walter, oblate
Georgetown, KY*



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Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord

Ownership and need: a training tool for community, respect, trust, and obedience



John Brooks

Having clearly established that the individual monk should own absolutely nothing in Chapter 33, St. Benedict now turns his attention to the material goods that each monk actually has for his use, even while not owning them. As we often see in the writings of St. Benedict, he gives authority to his teachings by referencing scripture. At the beginning of Chapter 34, he quotes, *“Distribution was made as each had need”* (Acts 4:35).

This teaching is very difficult in our present age. We often judge our own worth and the worth of others based on what we own. Our need for ownership greatly exceeds our needs, even allowing for some degree of earned comfort.

Sometimes, we see this teaching of ownership and need used as a training method for community, respect, trust, and obedience. When my youngest daughter enlisted in the Army and

went to basic training, her first letter home was filled with a description of her tough drill sergeants and their confiscation of all their personal belongings. In return, they were given what the drill sergeants determined they needed.

In a short amount of time, the recruits learned respect, trust, dependence, and obedience to their leaders. As the training continued and a need developed, it was the drill sergeants who fulfilled those needs and rewarded the desired behaviors. This training method is time-tested and very effective.

After her training, my daughter came home with a new perspective on need. While she still has her military perspective, I see how our consumer-focused ownership model has modified her perspective.

My wife passed away eight years ago, and I still live in the same house by myself, filled with 43 years of memories. I really do not need a four-bedroom house, but I have trouble letting go. Every part of the house is filled with reminders of my wife and the years we spent together.

In years past, before my health changed, I enjoyed woodworking. My woodshop is full of tools, scraps of wood, paints, stains, and several unfinished projects. There was a time when I needed those things. Sadly, the time has passed.

I have asked myself if there might not be someone who could use the God-given gifts, they must make the tools sing again and create beautiful crafts for others.

There was a time when I loved to cook, and I have a kitchen full of the gadgets needed to turn raw ingredients into delicious food for others to enjoy. Sadly, that time passed, and I don't enjoy just cooking for one person. I have asked myself if someone could use these gadgets to create delicious food for others to enjoy.

It would be easier if someone told me what I needed. Left on my own to decide, the judgements of others, my self-image, and my emotional connections influence my choices.

*John Brooks, oblate
Columbus, IN*



Got a hobby?

Tell us about it. We'd love to share it.

How long has this been a hobby?

What got you interested?

How is it challenging?

Why do you enjoy it?

Does this hobby enhance your life as an oblate?

Send article to kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com

Signals in the Noise: Problem or Tension?

Editor's note: Signals in the Noise is a column for oblates trying to tune into God's presence amid the stress of everyday life.



Keith Jennings

It was the end of a busy work week. Each day had been packed with meetings, calls, presentations, to-dos, and drive-by “can you” requests.

I walked to the parking lot at a faster than usual pace. As an introverted senior executive who has to be “on,” I was mentally and emotionally exhausted, and ready to be home. When I got to my car, I threw my tote into the back floorboard, fell into the driver’s seat, put the key into the ignition, and click, click, click, click. My battery was dead. It was a frustrating inconvenience. Fortunately, I found someone gracious enough to help me jump-start my car.

I share that story with you because it illustrates an everyday problem that we all encounter.

Here’s another recent challenge I faced. See if you can discern the difference between it and the dead battery story above.

In the spring of 2021, I stepped on the scale to discover I weighed 194 lbs. I had suspected I had gained weight. As a 6’ 1” ectomorph, I had always weighed around 175 lbs. When I told my wife I was going to start working out, she said, “Your weight is mostly about what and when you eat, not what you do.”

She helped me calculate my daily macros, and I used an app to track everything I ate. Over time, I changed what, how much, and when I ate. A few months later, when I stepped on the scale, it read 178 lbs.! Well, that was the end of 2021. In 2022, I quit

tracking my eating. My old snacking habits returned. Earlier this year, I stepped on the scale to discover I was back up to 187 lbs.

Both the dead battery and my weight gain are recent challenges I’ve faced. But there is an important difference between the two. Some challenges we face are problems, while other challenges are tensions.

A problem is solvable. A tension is not.

A problem has a root cause and a cure. A tension is perpetually present and requires ongoing care and attention. Once addressed, problems go away, but tensions don’t. You can manage a tension, but you cannot eliminate it.

The dead car battery was a problem. Once I bought and installed a new battery, my car was operational again. Problem solved. My weight is a tension. I cannot solve my weight. I can only manage it.

St. Benedict clearly understood the difference between problems and tensions. His “little rule for beginners” is chock-full of guidance on how to navigate these distinct challenges. The *Rule* is a playbook for managing the many tensions we have to deal with living in communion with a God we can’t comprehend and within a community that continually tests our patience and peace of mind.

Scan through the contents of the *Rule*; seeking council from others, restraint of speech, humility, sleeping arrangements, distribution of goods, caring for the sick and weak, reception of guests, dealing with grumbling, tardiness, and idleness. The *Rule* is filled with advice on managing the many tensions we face

praying, working, and living together as human beings.

The problem you and I face on a day-to-day basis as oblates is that we don’t recognize or distinguish between problems and tensions, which can foster frustration, and in some cases, anger. However, when we understand that we’re dealing with two distinct types of challenges, it can transform the way we respond.

As I began my novitiate as an oblate, I made a commitment to pray Lauds first thing in the morning and Vespers before dinner, each and every day. Repeatedly I was interrupted by my wife or kids, our cat or dog, or my phone dinging or ringing. And in those moments, I could feel the anger building.

I eventually came to accept that this isn’t a problem to solve, it’s tension to manage. Life happens! When I’m tending to the needs of my family and home, I’m being obedient to God as much as when I’m praying. These days, I try to treat these interruptions as if God is calling me (although I still catch myself grumbling at times).

Next time you find yourself growing increasingly frustrated by a situation you are facing, stop and ask yourself this question, “Is this a problem I can solve, or a tension I must manage?”

If it’s a problem, solve it and move on. However, when it’s a tension, tap into the humility, stability, obedience, and many virtues and tools the Benedictine way offers you.

Discerning between problems and tensions offers us powerful insight and clarity into the everyday challenges we face.

*Keith Jennings, oblate
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Desert Wisdom in the Time of Oblates



Michael Seretny

One of the true blessings of an oblate chapter is the wide variety of experiences and practices of its members. The members can vary in spiritual formation from an oblate novice,

in initial formation, to those oblates who have made final oblation years and years ago. The strength of a chapter is that despite the differing levels of spiritual formation and practice, all are moving in one direction, “to prefer nothing to the love of Christ” (RB 4:21).

St. Benedict teaches us, “Therefore, we must establish a school of the Lord’s service” (RB Prol. 21). That school is our oblate community and your local Saint Meinrad oblate chapter. Towards this end, each oblate chapter can facilitate a path or journey through which we teach each other through our varied experiences. When we share our daily efforts and growth in faith with each other, we will strengthen each other, our oblate community, and our collective faith.

A few months ago, we created a web-based outreach program for the online oblate chapter. It offers an individual Desert Saying for personal reflection, on a weekly basis. We asked our chapter members to reflect on that saying much as they do with their daily *lectio divina* practice. They share their reflections in a written post on the online website during the week. The participation and responses were gratifying and insightful. Indeed, there is much to learn from these reflections. A major goal of this weekly activity is the sharing of actual oblate practices (praxis). Our oblate

responses were the inspiration for this series of articles.

The Desert Sayings (*Apophthegmata Patrum*) are those written traditions, attributed to the early church Fathers (Abba) and Mothers (Amma) in the Egyptian desert during the 5th century. Some of the early church fathers and mothers may be familiar, such as Abba Anthony, Evagrius Ponticus, John Cassian, or Amma Syncletica. The original sayings were passed down in Coptic language and later written in Greek at the end of the 4th century. Their stories (sayings) relate to the monastic spiritual practices of the hermits in the Egyptian desert.

The themes are varied, and a partial list includes prayer (heyschia), discernment, vigilance, obedience, humility, and charity. They comprise a written record of the spiritual direction offered our earliest church hermits. The alphabetical collection numbers 131 sayings. Over 1/7th of these sayings are the spiritual direction of Abba Poemen (the Shepherd). He was revered for his spiritual advice and care for the weaknesses of his brethren.

The entire collection is part of the larger literary genre of “Wisdom Literature” that includes several Old Testament books; The Book of Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Psalms, Song of Solomon (Song of Songs), Wisdom of Solomon, and Ecclesiasticus (Wisdom of Sirach), and our daily recitation of the Psalms during hours.

During the third week of the Desert Sayings reflections, we introduced a foundational saying from Abba Elias, known as Venerable Elias the Hermit (4th century). His response, the prompt for our oblate’s reflections was,

“A brother...came to Abba Elias and said to him, ‘Abba give me a way of life.’ The old man said to the brother, ‘In the days of our predecessors they took great care about three virtues: poverty, obedience, and fasting. But among monks nowadays avarice, self-confidence, and great greed have taken charge. Choose whatever you want most.’”

By introducing his saying, we proposed to draw forth a series of individual reflections which highlight the current core virtues of today’s oblates. This was accomplished through a focus question:

What is the single great virtue that guides your “way of life” today as a Benedictine oblate?

One’s current “way of life” elicited three frequently subscribed virtues. Oblates referred to obedience, trust, and humility as their core internal charisms. These virtues are inter-related. St. Benedict speaks of obedience in RB 5 and humility in RB 7. He ties obedience to the first step of humility (RB 5:1). This charism ties one to Christ above and beyond all else. These are the ones that put aside their own concerns and self-will in deference to Christ (RB 5:7). In humility, they empty themselves in obedience to Christ. Most responses see humility as the necessary virtue to enable all other virtues.

As one oblate pointed out, the tie between obedience and trust is complicated. Obedience implies trust in a spiritual sense. As one surrenders to the will of Christ, they trust in his “best interest” in them. We are called to abide (trust) in Christ in John 15:5, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him

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will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.” We reside in the Lord, who provides us with infinite grace to accomplish all things. To remain in Him requires our total trust. In that trust, we bear fruit. As He is our Creator, that trust enables us to obey Him. Other oblates cited that trust in God brings them peace, joy, and confidence.

Several oblates took a different approach by reflecting on Abba Poemen’s process. One oblate

remarked that the monk who asked needs to realize that the spiritual life requires time, discipline, and sacrifice. They noted that Abba Poemen gave them options. He endorsed “free will.” He did not specify a so called “correct path.” Each of us walks our journey with Christ on a path to which He calls us. Finally, one oblate mentioned that the questioning monk followed the 8th step of humility by asking for the guidance of a “senior monk” (RB 7:55).

Many of the oblates related that living apart from the world requires patience and perseverance. Being a witness requires sacrifice and patience. Forty-seven words spoken in the 5th century have produced so much fruit today among our oblates. Let us end with one of my favorite Antiphons, “May your love be upon us, O Lord, as we place all our trust in you...”

In the next issue of the *Benedictine Oblate Quarterly*, we will look into the Desert Wisdom of Prayer.

*Michael Seretny, PhD, oblate,
West Lafayette, IN*

The Secret of Life



David Cox

We are aware of the adage that “you can’t take it with you.” No matter how much we accumulate in terms of material possessions and wealth, at the time of death, if

not before, we will take nothing with us.

This leaves us with two truths: first, that our religious belief in the afterlife is important. And second, since we take nothing with us that is tangible, then our impact on other people, our relationships, is our value.

This leads to some very distinct statements about the distribution of goods:

First, while we are not all going to be monk-like and have a small set of worldly possessions, we should strive

to follow the Norwegian lifestyle of *hygge* and surround ourselves with as few possessions as possible. Keep life simple, uncluttered, and uncomplicated.

Second, it means we should use material possessions, including money and wealth, to benefit other people. While we have some portion of our resources that we must use for our own preservation and our own survival, (and to a certain extent our own comfort), we also sacrifice and dedicate as much of our resources as possible to benefiting the lives of others by providing opportunities and resources to those in need. This includes the hungry, those lacking confidence, the poor, and those requiring help. We must strive to search for those who are in need and have as much of an impact as we can.

Third, we must concentrate on building positive relationships. There are relationships we did not choose, like family members, relatives,

extended relatives, people who are tied to us. We must try to make those relationships strong and positive. We have other relationships associated with work, education, neighborhoods, community, church, where we continue to build relationships with other people. But, we also must push to go beyond that to find those who need care, love, and respect.

I’ve had chance encounters that left a positive impact on me and maybe on them too, even if we never met again. We must always be open to what we can do by having a positive outlook on life and positively interacting with other people as much as possible.

This builds enduring relationships and leads to our worldly immortality. When it is all said and done, it will have mattered that we were here and who we affected along the way.

*David Cox, oblate
Monticello, IL*

New Chapter of Benedictine Oblates

Fulfills Need for Those Seeking God in Everyday Life



By Lisa Kochanowski, originally published in *Today's Catholic* on May 23, 2023. Reprinted with permission.

At a young age, Patty Opaczewski felt called by God to live a life of faith. Her time being educated in the Catholic schools left a lasting impression on her including a deep love and admiration for the sisters. Although she discerned religious life, she also knew she desperately wanted a family and took the path of marriage and motherhood.

“I talked to God a lot and I said, ‘You know what, I think I would love that life, but I really want a family too,’” recalled Opaczewski. She got married and had four children. Unfortunately, the marriage ended in divorce and her children grew and started lives of their own. “And so, years went by and I was searching again and doing everything I could at church. I belonged at that time to St. Matthew's Cathedral in South Bend, IN. I was a Eucharistic minister and used to go to all of the retreats. I just soaked up anything I could find but I just kept wanting more.”

A chance reading of a pamphlet about Saint Meinrad Archabbey inspired her to travel to the monks of the Benedictine community and learn more about their work and devotion to the *Rule of St. Benedict* with the motto ‘ora et labora’ or pray and work.

“It felt like home. And the people down there are so welcoming. All the monks and the brothers, everyone is just so welcoming. It fills a part in your life,” said Opaczewski. She joined the Benedictine Oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey in 2004.

The Benedictine Oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey form a community that adheres to the teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the holy *Rule of St. Benedict*, and the values of the monks of Saint Meinrad. The Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend has a local chapter started by oblate Dan Sheets. They meet at the St. Bavo Community Center every third Monday of the month. Members of the chapter, a small local community of believers from different parishes, live by the *Rule of St. Benedict*. They support one another

and join together in prayer and spiritual discovery. The mission statement for chapters of Benedictine Oblates of Saint Meinrad is: “We, Benedictine Oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, are Christian men and women, lay and ordained, living in the world, united by the holy *Rule of St. Benedict*. We come together in chapters to support one another and strengthen our spiritual life through liturgical celebration, instruction, and fellowship in Christ, so ‘that in all things God may be glorified’ (RB 57:9).”

To become an oblate, one must be a Christian lay or ordained person with an upright character, not be an oblate of another monastery, and have an earnest desire for spiritual advancement according to the Christian ideas outlined in the *Rule of St. Benedict*. Interested persons embark on a novitiate program that lasts a minimum of one year with a maximum of two years. After a year as an oblate, novices participate in a ceremony called the act of final oblation and become permanent members of the monastic family. According to the Saint Meinrad information site, the group strives through prayer, liturgical celebration, instruction, and fellowship in Christ to be people who experience the richness of the Benedictine monastic tradition while living in the world.

Oblates are formed with three promises and five duties. The first promise, stability of heart, expresses the commitment the oblate makes to a particular monastic community. The stability of the heart reaffirms the basic promise of conversion made at baptism. The second promise, fidelity

Continued on page 12

Continued from page 11

to the spirit of monastic life, expresses a commitment to live lives of spirituality, piety, and balance. The third promise, obedience to the will of God, expresses a commitment to growth in the discernment of God's will through prayer, spiritual direction, and faithfulness to one's religious traditions.

Oblates accept five duties into their lives that hold a formative and sustaining function in their journey. The five duties are praying the Liturgy of the Hours, regularly reading the *Rule of St. Benedict*, practicing *lectio divina*, being faithful to the sacraments or other religious practices, and cultivating a sense of God's presence in daily living. Benedictine Oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey are committed to forming a community of love and faith based on the promises and duties of oblate life.

Different reasons and circumstances call people to join a monastic lifestyle. The timing was everything for Tim Allega, and his life changes led him to the oblates. "About three years ago,

we became fully retired and moved to South Bend to be closer to the grandchildren. And at that time, I noticed a nice little announcement that said a chapter was forming of the oblates," said Allega about how he became involved with the local chapter. He attended Saint Meinrad High School back in the 1950s which ignited his association with the community. "During the time of becoming fully retired, I needed a little boost to provide a little discipline to my prayer life and the oblate chapter has certainly done that for me."

Through his participation, he has realized the Benedictine fundamental principle is to help one another get to heaven. "And I figured I needed some help, so I hope that by being a member of the oblate community, I'm getting that help and perhaps providing help to my brother oblates and sister oblates in that direction."

Allega began his formation period during the COVID-19 isolation period. The novice period is a one-year program where participants complete a series of 12 lessons under the mentorship of one of the monks. They receive a challenge every month and are required to respond to a list of short readings. "It was a real opportunity to get closer to God," notes Allega. While in quarantine, the program formation was a welcome break from listening to CNN and a way of remaining active and connected during a time of isolation.

John Lehner went on a men's retreat that took him to Saint Meinrad and he said he thoroughly enjoyed the



experience. He returned home from the trip on a Sunday night and called the director on Monday morning asking to become an oblate.

Lehner said his reasons were deeper than just an inspirational moment on a retreat though. Years ago, while doing his daily 52-mile commute to work, he was in a horrible accident. Hit broadside by a semi, his vehicle was pushed more than 135 feet and his life was changed. Lehner found himself frustrated with God asking why this happened to him. Words from his pastor saying he needed to look at this experience not as why did it happen to me, but I survived because God has more for me to do on this earth inspired his journey to a deeper devotion to his faith.

Lehner became a regular volunteer at Saint Meinrad Archabbey and found great joy in his work and connections with the monks and oblates. "It's just a whole different experience rather than just an everyday walk of life. It just makes me feel so close to God."

A visit to Monastery Immaculate Conception in Ferdinand, IN, had a lasting impression on oblate Karen Dwyer who upon research fell in love with the Benedictine *Rule* and way of life. She spent several years going on



retreats with the sisters and found the opportunity to join a local chapter of Benedictine oblates immediately sparked her interest.

“I was just retiring at that point and I thought, ‘I need something to do and this really is attractive to me,’ so I came to the first meeting that we had. There was just a very small number of

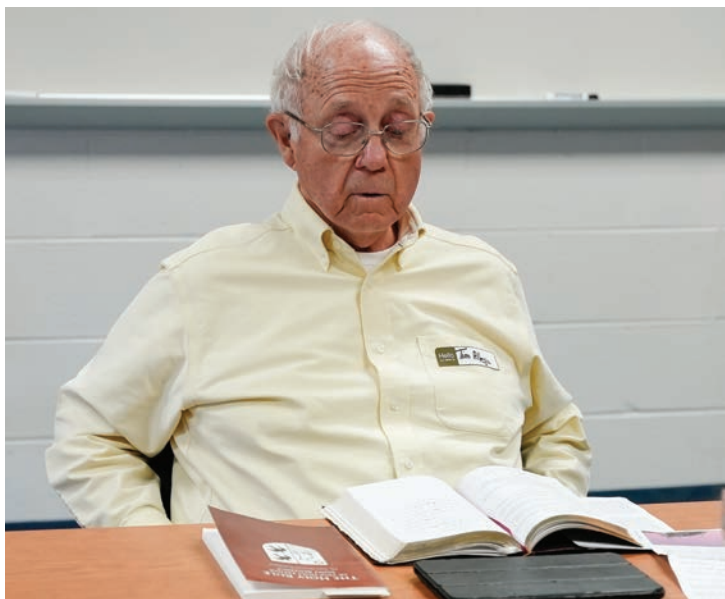
us and I attended the meetings for a year,” recalled Dwyer. She was called to become a novice and took her final profession to the organization in 2021.

“As a local chapter of Benedictines in the diocese, the greatest highlight was having Bishop Rhoades visit us at our monthly meeting in April. It was such an honor to have him pray with us and see what we do,” said Dwyer about a memorable moment within the local chapter. “We presented him with a copy of the *Rule of St. Benedict* because of its importance in forming our

spirituality. We also presented him with some of the products made by the monks like Peanut Brother Daily Grind peanut butter and Alleluia Almond Butter. It was a lovely, informal visit and meant so much to all of us to share our faith with our bishop.”

Dwyer said her time being part of the Mishawaka Chapter of Benedictine Oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey has been a wonderful experience. “This past Christmas, we adopted a family and provided \$250 for groceries and bought clothes and toys for the children. I was overwhelmed by the generosity of our small group in providing a happy Christmas for this small family. It is so nice to have a group pull together to make a service project so successful.”

To learn more about the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend chapter of the Benedictine Oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, contact chapter leader Dan Sheets at drsheets@aol.com



Sharing Goods



Fran Brown

As a volunteer at St. Elizabeth’s Catholic Charities, in New Albany, IN, I collect many useful items that can be distributed to those in need through Marie’s

Ministries. See www.stecharities.org.

It is a great joy to deliver functional items that will supply a family with gently used clothing, linens, household items, and furniture.

The benefit of receiving such goods makes a positive community impact.

It can mean the difference between having food, medicine, or paying a utility bill. Last year St. Elizabeth’s gave away \$30,000 worth of emergency diapers. Such efforts are vital for hundreds of families. Generous donors, volunteers and staff who manage our programs do a phenomenal job.

I have met many giving people over the years that recognize the need for passing on useful items that are basic needs for many families. Fabric, yarn, and unfinished projects seem to find their way to our house that my husband calls JoAnn Fabric Annex. Miraculously folks have showed up to sew baby items at our home and others sew at their home. I supply the

materials they need mostly from the stash that has been given to me. We recycle jeans that people collect into diaper bags. We use our creativity to design them with a mix of function and pizzazz. All of our finished products make their way for distribution to those who need them.

When I receive items that are clean, useful, and in good condition, I know there is love involved on the part of the donors. They recognize the dignity of the people who will receive them. This is truly the Benedictine spirit being lived out very simply.

*Fran Brown, oblate
Louisville, KY*

Oblate Study Days focuses on polarization



Jodi and Joe Knapp

Polarization...what is it and how are we called to respond as Benedictine oblates in our world?

Seldom do we stop and reflect on all the areas where we may become polarized. In June, Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, presented “Contributing to a Depolarized World: A Benedictine Project” for the Oblate Study Days.

Over the four days, participants were given the opportunity to delve deeper into these issues while reflecting on the *Rule of St. Benedict*. We examined how the *Rule* can form us, providing us with the guidance to live a more depolarized lifestyle.

This article summarizes polarization and suggested antidotes provided by Br. John Mark in light of the *Rule*.

Study Days began with a little inventory designed to help us develop a better understanding of what polarization looks like for each of us. Br. John Mark asked the following questions:

1. Do you check the news headlines more than twice a day?

2. In the last month, have you forwarded, shared, retweeted a political article, opinion piece, meme, etc?

3. At the last election, did you vote straight ticket (i.e., all democrat / all republican)?

4. Is your primary news source one of the following?

Fox News - MSNBC - CNN - Newsmax - Facebook - Breitbart - Huff Post

5. Do most of your friends share the same political beliefs that you do?

6. Have you referred to people of the opposite political party as “crazy” or “criminal”?

After assuring us that if we learned we are part of the problem...we are also part of the solution, Br. John Mark provided the following definition of polarization. According to a study by Jan-Willem van Prooijen, polarization is “a strong conviction in one’s own values and beliefs, and hostility towards those who are perceived to hold different values and beliefs.” These convictions can create divisions in families, communities, and people from other groups.

As we continued to go deeper into learning about polarization, Br. John Mark discussed two types of polarity: Positive-Negative and Positive-Positive. Positive-Negative is tension between good and bad, like health and sickness. Positive-Positive is tension between two positive things like justice and mercy.

According to Br. John Mark, it is easier to live in a Positive-Negative world, as Positive-Positive issues can be confusing and involve tension requiring compromise, ambiguity, and humility. This is where practicing the Benedictine guidance of humility and hospitality in our interactions with others helps us work through tensions that arise in various circumstances. Br. John Mark pointed out how access to technology has improved areas of our lives. Unfortunately, it has also contributed to polarization by creating an “un-refereed” explosion of information from anonymous sources that is not necessarily accurate or complete.

Turning again to St. Benedict, we learn silence is one of the antidotes to polarization according to Br. John Mark. He explained there are two different forms of silence. Receptive silence, which is how much and what kind of noise we surround ourselves with, and expressive silence, which is how much and what we say.

Br. John Mark explained how confirmation bias, assimilation, and accommodation impact polarization. Confirmation bias describes the tendency of humans to look for or selectively tune in to information that confirms what they believe to be true; assimilation refers to how we fit new information or experiences into an existing framework for the way we see things; and accommodation refers to

changing our mental framework or way of seeing things in order to make sense of a new experience or piece of information. While the *Rule of St. Benedict* was written decades ago, the importance St. Benedict places on community, humility, mutual obedience, and moderation, remain necessary today.

Community, one of the central themes in the *Rule of St. Benedict*, develops in a variety of ways. According to Br. John Mark, tribalism is often based on homogeneity, similarities of people within a group, that may happen within communities. Researchers have noted the “fundamental sense of belonging” found within tribes. Difficulties arise when we think of other tribes as “those people.” Br. John Mark described how modern day tribes may be formed online where it is much easier to remain anonymous and therefore feel as if anything can be said. At this point, Br. John Mark shared the following quote from Abraham Lincoln, “I don’t like that man, I must get to know him better.”

Moving to how our perceptions can play a role in polarization, Br. John Mark shared the following definition from Peter Coleman, “Perceptual polarization is the degree to which a gap exists between what Americans believe to be the attitudes of the opposing party on an issue and what their attitudes actually are. A recent study showed that most Americans believe that members of the other party dehumanize, dislike, and disagree with their own party about twice as much as they actually do.”

Looking at the *Rule of St. Benedict*, Br. John Mark pointed to the importance of hospitality and humility as an antidote to perceptual polarization. Humility proceeds hospitality, as humility in a polarized world allows “respectful ways to express your dividedness within your

groups/tribes.” Humility allows us to step back and look at a situation from a different point of view.

Sometimes we find ourselves in the midst of a polarizing conversation and are not sure how to respond. Br. John Mark shared that we have the choice to move away, toward or against a person or situation. According to Karen Horney, while we rarely move against the person or situation, we may occasionally move away from the conflict. Most often, we can move toward the person or situation to try and develop a better relationship or understanding. Br. John Mark stated, the primary question is, “Which will allow me to preserve the relationship?” He also noted that moving away from a conflict is not always conflict avoidance, rather it may be restraint or control. Looking closely at what our responses may be will give us a better idea of how and if we can preserve the relationship. Br. John Mark stated that in this area of depolarization, guidance from the *Rule of St. Benedict* involves stability, because staying in the relationship is the only way we grow.

In the final session, Br. John Mark talked about faith and trust. Beginning with how we learn about trust when we are young, and how this sense of trust in the other and in the world helps to develop our empathy. He then looked at fear and how this can divide people against one another and bind like-minded people together. This fear can result in people not trusting in others or institutions.

Br. John Mark explained how fear and mistrust can be powerful tools when aiming to polarize a group. He then posed the question, “Can you really destroy a person’s trust in the basic goodness of others once it has been established?” Following this, he shared with us that faith involves two senses: Trust or confidence in

something or someone and belief in the doctrines or teachings of a religion. He then pointed out that our Catholic faith and our Benedictine charism are essential to working toward depolarization in our world, as each is communal in nature, centered on liturgy, establish places of peace, prefiguring the Kingdom here on Earth, and restoring the Paradise around us and within us.

As oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, we are blessed to have a community of Benedictine brothers who help to guide us as we live our calling to bring the Benedictine charism out to the world. They assist us in increasing our knowledge as we strive to live holy lives. These Study Days, including the time spent with Br. John Mark and the oblate community, supported us in our desire to learn more about depolarization. Learning the antidotes for depolarization, including moderation, mutual obedience, community, faith, hospitality, discretion, humility, and silence, can be found in the *Rule of St. Benedict*, and how the *Rule* provides us with the guidance we need, is a remarkable gift for all of us.

*Jodi and Joe Knapp
Bloomington, IL*

Four books in the Alcuin Oblate Library to help us understand and diffuse polarization:

Sacred Speech: a Practical Guide for Keeping Spirit in Your Speech by Rev. Donna Schaper. 241.4 SCH299

A Guide to Living in the Truth: Saint Benedict's Teaching on Humility by Michael Casey. 255.106 C338h

Countering Religious Extremism: The Healing Power of Spiritual Friendships by David Carlson. 261 C284

The Church's Mission in a Polarized World by Fr. Aaron Wessman.

A mathematical and spiritual journey with the Archabbey Church pavement

Part 3: Symbolism (circle, triangle, square, *guilloche*, *vesica piscis*)

Editor's note: This is the third article in a four-part series about the floor of the Archabbey Church.



Maureen Reichardt

During a fall 2022 retreat at Saint Meinrad titled, “Beauty as a Pathway to God: Religious Art and Symbol in the Spiritual Life,” Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, discussed criteria

for judging the symbolic strength of a piece of art. First, it must be open-ended and multivalent. Ongoing examination reveals new levels of meaning—like peeling away the layers of an onion. Next, it must engage the viewer over time. For the past twenty-two years, the pavement of the Saint Meinrad Archabbey Church has been, for me, just that: a visual “text” that always seems to reveal—through study or contemplation or conversations—new levels of artistic and theological meaning.

In this third article about the Archabbey Church floor, I will offer some thoughts concerning the symbolism of several of its design elements, including three basic geometric shapes (circle, triangle, and square) and two other distinctive patterns, the *guilloche* and the *vesica piscis*.¹

In ancient Greek thought, the circle was the visual representation of the number “one” and embodied the concept of “ultimate unity.”² It

symbolizes the eternal and the divine. The design of the Saint Meinrad pavement contains six circles corresponding to the six existing vaults of the church ceiling [Images 1 and 2]. The Archabbey publication, *The Renewed Heart of Saint Meinrad*, notes that the original church architect may have intended these vaults to represent the six days of creation.

The triangle, a visual representation of the number “three”, is for Christians, a traditional symbol of the Holy Trinity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the nave of the Saint Meinrad pavement, large overlapping equilateral triangles are used to create five six-pointed stars [Images 1 and 2]. *The Renewed Heart of Saint Meinrad* observes that this “Star of David” is a symbol sacred in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. It also suggests that the largest of the thirteen colored triangles within the star may symbolize Christ, with the remaining smaller colored triangles representing the twelve apostles. Fr. Denis Robinson, OSB, once noted in a lecture that “the Trinity is at the center of our Church.” Upon hearing this theological statement, my mind turned to the physical pavement of the Archabbey Church, where triangles representing the Trinity appear at the exact center of the nave.

The third geometric figure, the square, while not explicit in the design of the mosaic pavement, is implied by the

church pillars on either side of the nave [Image 2, red figure]. With its connection to ideas such as the four primary points of the compass, the four seasons, and the four ancient elements (earth, water, air, and fire), the square symbolizes the material world. Therefore, in these three basic design elements—circle, triangle, and square—we see two dynamic contrasts: earth and heaven, man and God.

A prominent design element running the length of the Archabbey Church from entrance to apse is the *guilloche* [Image 2, purple figure]. In Cosmatesque pavements (Part Two of this series), the *guilloche* served a very practical purpose by providing a pathway for elaborate liturgical processions.

Aware of this historical background, the Church Renovation Committee felt that including the *guilloche* design in their own pavement would help draw congregations into the liturgical action area of the church.

On another level, the



Image 3: *Majestas Domini*; Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB.

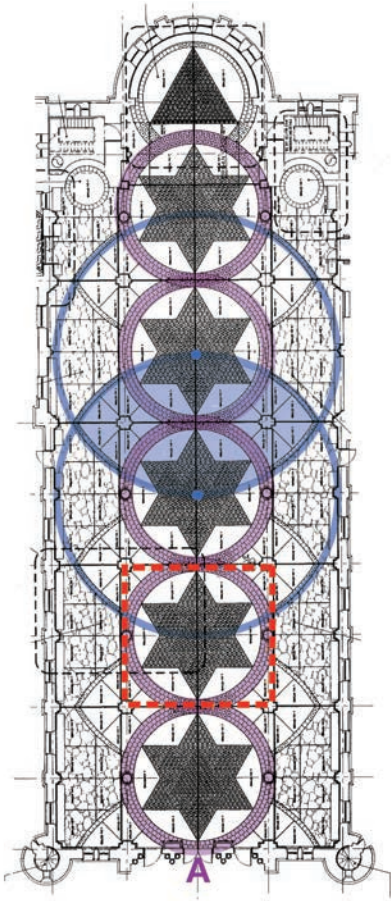


Image 2: Blueprint for the renovation of the Archabbey Church pavement (1997).

continuous loop of the *guilloche* symbolizes eternity. The forward and backward path of the *guilloche* also reflects the very nature of liturgy and the spiritual life. In *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley*, historian Richard Kieckhefer comments:

“Entering a church is a metaphor for entering into a spiritual process: one of procession and return, one of proclamation and response, or of gathering in community and returning to the world outside...The ebb and flow of liturgical movement echoes the rhythms of spiritual life and the Neo-platonic theme of procession and return: all things flow out from God and return to God; the worshipping soul turns to God in prayer and returns to the world.”

Relative to this idea of entering into a church and its liturgy and then

returning to the world, it is interesting to note that the circle of the *guilloche* nearest the west entrance of the Archabbey Church is not completed inside the building. Instead, it finds its imaginary completion in the world beyond the doors [Image 2, point A].

The last design to be considered is the *vesica piscis* (or *mandorla*). A geometric construction of a *vesica piscis* begins with drawing two circles of equal radius with each circle passing through the center of the other [Image 2, blue figure]. The *vesica piscis* [shaded] is the fish- (or almond-) shaped design formed by the overlapping interiors of the two circles. To the ancient Greeks, the *vesica piscis* represented the number “two” and was related to the concepts of “polarity” or “opposites.”³ Symbolically, if we allow the first circle in the figure to represent the eternal realm, then the second circle could represent its opposite: the earthly realm. As Christians, we find at the intersection of these two realms Jesus Christ, God incarnate. In Christian art, an image showing Christ within a *vesica piscis* is symbolic of Christ in majesty [Image 3].

In Part Two of this series, it was mentioned that both Cosmatesque pavements and the floor of the Archabbey Church are constructed using *opus sectile* (“cut work”) marble pieces. Although the cut pieces in Cosmatesque mosaics include a wide variety of polygonal shapes (including triangles, squares, rectangles, rhombuses, and hexagons) as well as circles and ellipses, there are only two *opus sectile* shapes used in the Saint Meinrad pavement: a triangle and a piece that is 1/52 of an annulus.⁴ Taken together, the design components of these

pavements offer the viewer a cosmology in stone, that is, a representation of the complex but orderly and harmonious universe created by God.

Actual “hard evidence” of specific cosmological intent can be found in the 13th century Cosmatesque pavement of the church sanctuary at Westminster Abbey in London. This pavement originally included a long Latin inscription—a mysterious poem set into the stones with brass letters—which can be translated, in part: “Here is... reveal[ed] the eternal pattern of the universe.”⁵

In Part Four, I will explore the symbolism of yet another of the Archabbey’s geometric designs, the Sierpinski triangle.

If you have any questions or comments, email me at: mreichardt9634@comcast.net.

Maureen Reichardt, oblate
Indianapolis, IN

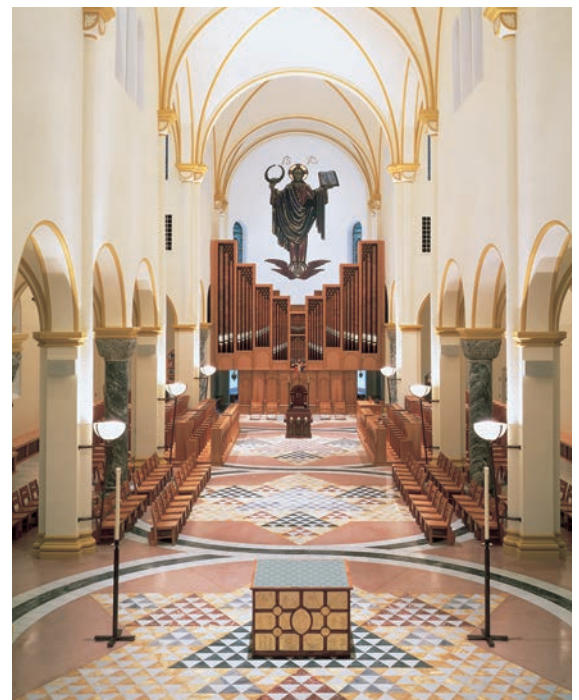


Image 1: Archabbey Church floor, looking east.

Continued on page 18

¹ Recall, from Part Two, that a *guilloche* consists of an sinuous interlacing band design surrounding a linear series of circular marble disks. A *vesica piscis* (or *mandorla*) is a fish- (or almond-) shaped design.

² Michael S. Schneider, *A Beginner's Guide to Constructing the Universe: The Mathematical Archetypes of Nature, Art, and Science* (2 and following).

³ Schneider (24 and following).

⁴ Informally, an annulus is a ring- or washer- (as in hardware) shaped figure. I will note here that the Saint Meinrad pavement also contains sections of terrazzo, which are not *opus sectile*. This topic will be discussed in Part Four. The number fifty-two is, of course, the number of weeks in a year.

⁵ Richard Foster, *Patterns of Thought: The Hidden Meaning of the Great Pavement of Westminster Abbey* (3).

OBLATE NEWS



Tim Tallent

Eucharist lies at the center of layman's life By Kayla Bennett, originally published in *The Record* on June 15, 2023. Reprinted with permission.

Tim Tallent considers himself to be a eucharistic person.

The St. John Paul II Church parishioner serves as an extraordinary minister of Holy Communion, bringing the Eucharist to people in his parish who are homebound.

Since becoming Catholic in 2005, he's been committed to living and learning his faith. He completed a discipleship program with the Archdiocese of Louisville and a theological certificate through Loyola University New Orleans. He's pursuing master catechist certification and he's a Benedictine oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey.

"I am constantly wanting to learn about my faith," he said during a recent interview.

Tallent doesn't work for the Church—in fact, he's part of the family business working in tax preparation—but he finds joy in sharing Communion and his faith with others, he said.

At the forefront of his mind, he said, is Matthew 18:20, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

"When I take Communion to the homebound, I feel like both I and whoever I'm taking it to are filled with grace," he said.

Currently, Tallent takes Communion to two homebound parishioners every week. He's served as many as four at one time but said typically he visits one or two people.

"When I go to them, they know the importance of the Eucharist," Tallent said. "One man I took Communion to had dementia. But he knew those prayers and would say the *Our Father*. He wouldn't know me but he knew those prayers."

Taking Communion to those unable to attend Mass is "the most grace-filled thing" he does other than receiving the Eucharist himself, Tallent said.

"When we're kneeling and the priest is saying the Eucharistic Prayer, in my mind I'm going back to what Jesus did for us," he said.

Being an oblate—a lay person who's committed to a religious order or community—has also helped Tallent keep the Eucharist at the center of his life, he said.

"I'm not perfect, but it's a little more in front of me," he said. "It reminds me to take God out to the people."

In the Benedictine tradition, Tallent prays the Liturgy of the Hours, which includes morning, evening and bedtime prayers. The prayers order his day and get him off on the right foot each morning, he said.

Another aspect of being an oblate is adhering to *bona opera*—which translates to "good works." For Benedictine oblates, it means keeping Lenten promises. Tallent, a self-proclaimed nerd, said his Lenten promise one year was to read the documents of the Second Vatican Council. He didn't agree with everything the council changed, he said, but he enjoyed learning about it and understanding it more fully.

"And now I know it and have a passion for it," he said.

His other passion is helping other Catholics realize the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.

"I've read (that) only 31 percent of Catholics believe in the true Body and Blood," Tallent said. "I wish I could express what it truly means so that number rises."

OBLATE NEWS *cont.*

DEATHS

Lora Altstadt, of Huntingburg, IN, died on July 27, 2023.

Carol A. Devine, of Hicksville, NY, died on July 22, 2023.

Mark Robbins, of Indianapolis, IN, died on July 1, 2023.

Janet L. Orth, of Indianapolis, IN, died on June 11, 2023.

Dr. Robert E. Collins, MD, of Kettering, OH, died on April 22, 2023.

Stephanie Towle, of Nashville, TN, died on March 11, 2023.

Joan K. Collins, of Kettering, OH, died on February 12, 2023.

George Mercer, of Corpus Christi, TX, died on May 5, 2021.

INVESTITURES

The following were invested as oblate novices on June 3, 2023:

Frank Alvarez, Georgetown, TX; Lindsay A. Cooley, Louisville, KY; Miranda F. Dale, Garrett, IN; Susan A. Hall, Newburgh, IN; William A. Hall, Newburgh, IN; Charles Shackelford, Newburgh, IN; Donna M. Sigler, Mount Carmel, IL; and James R. Sigler, Mount Carmel, IL. ♦

OBLATIONS

The following made their final oblation on June 3, 2023:

Adam Altman, Bartlett, TN; Jean P. Kelly, Westerville, OH; and Daniel Lowery, Bargersville, IN. ♦

UPCOMING EVENTS

Investiture and Oblation Rites:

September 23, 2023; March 2, 2024

Oblate Retreats: December 8-10, 2023; March 19-21, 2024

Oblate Council and Finance

Committee Meetings: October 13-15, 2023 ♦

VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office were Benedictine monks Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, Br. Michael Reyes, Br. Gregory Morris, Novice Patrick Allbright, and Novice Andrew Levering, Fr. Eugene Hensell, Fr. Joseph Cox, Fr. Mateo Zamora, Fr. Meinrad Brune, Fr. Lorenzo Penalosa, Fr. Colman Grabert, Fr. Jeremy King, Br. John Mark Falkenhain, Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, Fr. Thomas Gricoski, Br. Joel Blaize, Br. Francis de Sales Wagner, Br. James Jensen, and oblates Joanna Harris, Michelle Blalock, Teresa Lynn, Andy and Bridget Kosegi, newsletter editor Kathleen Polansky, and assistant editor Angie McDonald, oblate candidate Joy Fish, and Doris Schaefer. ♦



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We REALLY want you and your articles!

The *Benedictine Oblate Quarterly* invites oblates and oblate novices to submit news and information about your chapter or write an article about your Benedictine journey.

We also have a theme for each upcoming issue that we welcome you to reflect on and submit an article. Finally, please submit a book review for the Reading Room column.

All submissions must include your name, city and state. A maximum 700-word limit is suggested. If choosing to add sources, please use endnotes and not footnotes. Send all submissions to Kathleen Polansky at kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com and include your name, city and state.

Upcoming themes and submission dates:

Winter – Final due date: Nov. 1, 2023 (Listening/Attentiveness)

Spring – Final due date: Feb. 1, 2024 (Benedictine Spirituality Dismantling Polarization)

Summer – Final due date: May 1, 2024 (Women of Faith in the Life of the Church)

Fall – Final due date: Aug. 1, 2024 (Self-esteem vs. Ego)

Winter – Final due date: Nov. 1, 2024 (The Power of Ritual in Monasticism and the Lives of Oblates)

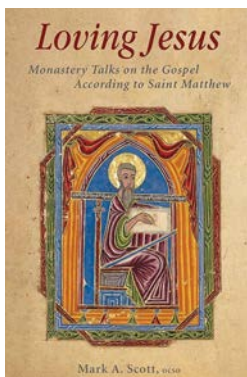


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Reading Room



Loving Jesus: Monastery Talks on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew

Mark A. Scott, OCSO
Cistercian Publications, 2023,
203 pages

This gem of a book comprises 44 reflections on Matthew's Gospel. These reflections are slightly edited versions of

addresses Abbot Mark Scott delivered to the monks in Chapter at New Melleray Abbey, a Cistercian monastery just outside of Dubuque, IA. The oral flavor of the reflections remains in the written form, adding to the charm of the reflections.

Abbot Scott is keen on developing an angle or digging deeper into a pericope that I never thought of or read about before, so I found myself saying repeatedly upon reading each reflection, "Wow, I never thought of that before!"

Chapter 36 of the book was impressive to me. Abbot Scott connected the story of Jesus' confrontation with demons and swine (Matthew 8:28-9:1).

The chapters are brief, mirroring the Chapter talks from which these reflections are culled, making them great for *lectio divina* readings. Do yourself a favor and get a hold of this book.

*Mark Plaiss, oblate
Mundelein, IL*