



*The scapular, given to an oblate when he/she is invested as a novice, serves as a sign of being a faithful disciple of St. Benedict.*

## Stability: A way to deeper faith

St. Benedict calls all who profess the *Rule* to “stability.” The monks vow a connection to one monastery. Oblates also connect our promises to one monastery.

Upon considering this and reflecting on Biblical accounts, we see that Abraham was called by God to pack up his family, depart his home and travel to parts unknown. Moses, called by God, was also to pack up all his kin, only to wander for years.

Paul, after his ride to Damascus, found himself traveling for the remainder of his life. Stability, at first glance, appears lost in these accounts. These folks are on the move.

How does one find stability in an ever-changing and constantly moving society? We pack up and move for careers, education, marriage, adventure. Even retirement often brings relocation. Our society does not make it easy to settle down and remain connected to one place. We are a mobile society.

Where is stability in all this frenetic movement? Those who make oblate promises are called to a way of life immersed in sacred Scripture, rooted in prayer and service, and focused on a relationship to our Triune God. Our stability to one monastery offers guidance in living and deepening our faith wherever we are called to reside.

Just as Abraham, Moses and Paul seemed only to be wandering about, their lives were directly and intimately connected to listening, following and trusting God. Our stability is found today in that same manner. We are to listen with the ear of our heart as God calls us to a life grounded in our promises to Saint Meinrad and to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate  
New Salisbury, IN*



# A POINT TO PONDER FROM *The Rule*

## “Stability”

*Rule of St. Benedict, 58:17-18*

Upon being received, they come before the whole community in the oratory and promise stability, fidelity to the monastic life, and obedience.

This is done in the presence of God and the saints to impress on the novices that if they ever act otherwise, they will surely be condemned by the one they mock.

As oblates we promise stability to Saint Meinrad monastery and to all the major commitments we have made in our lives.

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## Stability can lead to our heart's desire



*Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB*

Stability is about so much more than “staying in one place.” Home is where the heart is, and ultimately that is what stability is about. Where is your heart? Where is your treasure?

Especially for oblates, who do not live in a monastery, stability is about how you have “stabilized” your spirit – how you have set your hearts – in your search for God. Presuming the monk and the oblate have committed themselves to seeking God, the vow or promise of stability reminds us we need to get on with the search here and now.

Stability is an anchor that keeps us from drifting. And in the spiritual life, drifting is a frequent temptation. We drift, treading water, rather than swimming ahead. We drift, waiting for the current to carry us, rather than going ahead and making that plunge forward ourselves.

Stability encourages us to recognize the opportunities for growth and grace we

have before us now, at the present time and in our present place, rather than always waiting for the perfect opportunity we hope will come “sometime in the future.” Yes, patience is a virtue. But when patience mutates into procrastination, it becomes a vice.

Our culture today has been described as a “culture adrift.” We search for the perfect job, the perfect place to live, the perfect spouse with whom to live. We search for the perfect vacation, the perfect experience. Many times, even the more spiritual aspects of our life can fall victim to this addiction to searching.

We search for the perfect parish, which, of course, has to come with the perfect priest. We search for the perfect form of prayer and the perfect place in which to pray it. We search for the perfect meditation, the perfect book, the perfect teacher, believing that when we find them, then – and only then? – we will be able to become the monk, the oblate, we want to be. Stability urges us on! *This* is the place. Let us make our move *now*.

*Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB  
Saint Meinrad Archabbey*

## Stability is more than staying in place



*Janis Dopp*

One of the promises we make at our oblation ceremony is that we will pursue “stability of heart.” It sounds easy enough – especially when we are happy and all of the

primary relationships in our lives are going well, when our pastor is pleasant, when our boss is agreeable, or when our service commitments are manageable. But for everyone at some point, life

intervenes and the road we travel becomes a bit steeper.

Stability is not just about staying put physically. It also encompasses how we cultivate our spiritual and emotional commitments and our working relationships. It has to do with how we follow through on what we have agreed to do and how we have promised to live and love.

Recently, I had the opportunity to reconcile with someone who had not been part of my life in a tangible way for a very

long time. I felt much anxiety over what would happen, but I also knew that it was what I was called to do as a person who claims to put love first.

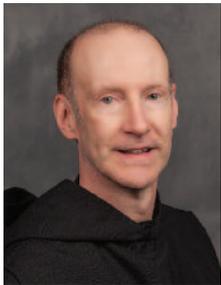
I should have realized that I was not alone when I met with him. God was with us, and the reunion was so sweet that it brings me to tears just thinking about it. Without my promise of stability of heart, I could very easily have ignored this relationship for the rest of

my life – and I would have been so much poorer because of it.

This experience has taught me to be unafraid of reconciliation and to rely on the strength that my promise of stability of heart has cultivated within me. The graces that flow from our attention to our promises are silent bulwarks in times of need.

*Janis Dopp  
Oblate Director*

## Stability can lead to greater freedom



*Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB*

In various ways, monasticism is different from the popular culture, and it is supposed to be. One of these ways is the vow of stability – a uniquely Benedictine

commitment to live in a particular monastic community for life. This is quite unlike the shakiness of many commitments of today's highly mobile society.

To live in stability is the opposite of the lifestyle of “gyrovagues,” who drift all their lives from monastery to monastery, staying only a few days. “Always on the move, they never settle down, and are slaves to their own wills and gross appetites” (RB 1:10-11).

For oblates, stability can speak to the importance of being mindful of the moment and the presence of God, staying rooted in the present, learning to wait patiently, and trying to stick with commitments, especially prayer and the service of others. Through centering our hearts on God, especially through our daily *lectio divina*, we are better able to dilute some of our restlessness.

For monks, nuns and oblates, a commitment to a specific community or

family can lead to greater freedom and joy as gradually over time we learn the meaning of loyalty, patience, persistence and forgiveness. As usual, St. Benedict knows people and he wants us to remember that too many distractions can impede us from knowing Christ more intimately. Consequently, stability of place and of heart are essential to a deeper love of the Lord.

*Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB  
Oblate Chaplain*

### Prayer for the Canonization of Servant of God Dorothy Day

God our Father, Your servant Dorothy Day exemplified the Catholic faith by her life of prayer, voluntary poverty, works of mercy, and the justice and peace of the Gospel of Jesus.

May her life inspire your people to turn to Christ as their Savior, to see His face in the world's poor, and to raise their voices for the justice of God's kingdom.

I pray that her holiness may be recognized by your Church and that you grant the following favor that I humbly ask through her intercession:  
(mention your request)

I ask this through Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

# OBLATES

*In their own words*



*Oblate Jodi Knapp  
Washington, IL*

Oh Lord, how you have blessed us with the gift of time. You have given us twenty-four hours in each day. You have not told us how to spend this time, rather have given us the ability to choose how to spend it.

Will we...

- ...spend time with you each day?
- ...spend time in the stillness?
- ...spend time learning from you and your people?
- ...spend time listening?
- ...spend time?

It is our choice to unwrap this amazing gift of time and determine how we are going to spend it. Please Lord, let me listen to you and follow your lead.

With great gratitude and love.  
Amen.



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# Notes for Novices *Stability and the rigors of love*



Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, OSB

be sure that novices can handle the rigors of love.

Benedict is quite clear that novices must persevere in stability before they can enter into the monastic life (see RB 58:9). This is to test whether novices truly seek God and to

Stability is a ceaseless dialogue between you, the people in your life, and – most importantly – God. Sometimes it will seem easier to flee from anxieties, like unfulfilling jobs, irritating relatives or petulant neighbors.

God is not concerned if we complete well or not a task on a to-do list. Rather, he is concerned with how we love each of our neighbors, especially if some of those neighbors make us want to dash off and never return to them again.

“How did you love your neighbor in stability of heart?”

Jesus tells us that we should take up our crosses and follow Him (see Matt 16:24-28), because remaining stable in love gives way to abundant and eternal life (see Jn 10:10).

Discern well your stability in life, for it will ground you in Christ with love of God and of your neighbor.

Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, OSB  
Oblate Novice Mentor

## Stability of Heart: *A Novice's Quest*



Joanna Harris

A journey of pondering is the journey of an oblate novice – and this is proving to be true for me. On this path, I've become intrigued by the notion of stability of heart. What does it mean? I had not honestly given much thought to the definition of stability beyond its usual association with the adjective “stable,” meaning a fixed, immovable structure – a structure with stability.

In our *Benedictine Oblate Novice Companion*, the first definition under “The Promises and Duties of an Oblate” (page 12) is “Stability of Heart.” Three sentences in that definition jumped off the page for me. First: “It’s because of our commitment and perseverance, or stability of heart, that we shall be saved.”

And the two sentences after the values of the Benedictine life are listed: “These values make stability of heart possible. The sense of purpose, of guided meaning in life, is the first fruit of stability.”

While reading this, more questions came. “Commitment to what? Perseverance in what sense?” Admittedly, there are infinite possibilities to explore here. I’d like to share two that came to mind during my prayer time. First, the commitment is of my heart and soul to Jesus Christ, guided by my vocation as an oblate. Second, I can choose perseverance when the inevitable struggles and challenges of living my faith and vocation occur.

St. Augustine expressed so beautifully my experience of life’s convoluted path when he declared, “But in my temporal life everything was in a state of uncertainty, and my heart needed to be purified from the old leaven. I was attracted to the Way, to the Savior Himself, but was still reluctant

to go along its narrow paths” (*Confessions*, Book 8\*). Long before I became an oblate novice, a desire of my heart and prayer was (and still is) to ask God to create in me a clean and contrite heart. Could this prayer be expressing my desire for stability of heart?

My vocation as an oblate is to live the values of St. Benedict; that’s why I choose to commit and to persevere. The result is that my heart seeks stability. Choosing stability of heart “purifies my heart,” as St. Augustine describes.

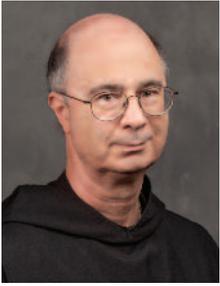
I have become willing to walk faith’s “narrow paths” to freedom! I am being guided and am so grateful to begin knowing a sense of purpose. Thanks to St. Benedict and to the monks and oblates here at Saint Meinrad, my former and very limited definition of stability is being entirely transformed!

Joanna Harris, oblate novice  
St. Meinrad, IN

\**Confessions* by St. Augustine. Henry Chadwick, Translator; Oxford World Classics; Oxford University Press: New York, 1991.

# The Practice of Vigilance in the Monastic Life

*This is the third article in a four-part series.*



Fr. Justin DuVall, OSB

The *Rule of St. Benedict* is a mix of teachings, admonitions, spiritual counsel and practical regulations for daily living. All of them belong to the

interconnected web that is the life of the monastery.

The values that the *Rule* enshrines find expression in the way life in the monastery is organized and in instructions to the monks “from a father who loves [them]” (RB Prologue 1) on how to “hasten toward [their] heavenly home” (RB 73:8). Love, then, is the first and the foremost force behind both the structures and the discipline of monastic life.

Like other values that sustain life in the monastery, vigilance does not exist in the abstract. St. Benedict embedded it in the way that he wanted his monks to live, and so it shapes the structure and dynamics of daily life. Vigilance permeates monastic life, but in this brief article I will look at just a few areas in which it finds particular expression.

Perhaps the most obvious expression of vigilance comes in the liturgical section of the *Rule*, in chapters dealing with the Divine Office at night (9-11, 14). The Office of Vigils, as we now call it, is the longest of the hours celebrated in choir, and it was true as well in St. Benedict’s day. The combination of psalms and readings, spread over several repeated nocturnes, constitutes the Office.

But the question remains: how does this daily Office embed the value of

vigilance? Like each of the hours in choir, it is a time for both communal and personal prayer. But unlike the other hours, Vigils keeps watch through the first hours of the day. Its length alone is demanding, interrupting sleep and filling the time with sustained attention to the Word of God.

We might say that this Office is characteristic of the monastic life because it calls the whole community to a watchfulness that begins each day and invites the individual monks to make this watchfulness a formative part of their *conversatio*. Monastic life feeds on the plain fare of God’s Word, broken daily and multiplied over a lifetime of fidelity. The Office of Vigils is not merely an individual heroic effort; it is the liturgical and communal expression of that deliberate mindfulness of God’s presence and salvation.

In addition to prayer as a way of embedding vigilance, the *Rule* also looks to individual asceticism. One example: famously it urges the monks to “keep death daily before your eyes” (RB 4:47). What at first blush might seem morbid is lacking its context. The verse immediately preceding it says, “Yearn for everlasting life with holy desire.”

Remembering the certainty of death serves as an act of hope in that everlasting life for which the monks are to yearn. Keeping the ultimate goal in mind purifies their actions so that they do not slip into the “sloth of disobedience” by which they would drift away from God (Prol. 2). All ascetical practice aims at this same target.

Lastly, fraternal relations within the community give expression to vigilance, too. The Prologue to the

*Rule* says, “...the Lord waits for us daily to translate into action, as we should, his holy teachings” (v. 35). Here it is almost as if the Lord is practicing a vigilance of his own, patiently waiting for the monks to grow into his way!

The values of respect for one another, of reverence for seniors and love for juniors, of anticipating one another’s needs – all sown throughout the *Rule* – respond to this vigilance of the Lord with perseverance. By “supporting one another’s weaknesses of body or behavior,” they learn to prefer nothing whatever to Christ (RB 72:5, 11) and thereby hasten toward their heavenly home. Through the vigilance of charity, they can expect that Christ “will bring [them] all together to everlasting life” (RB 72:11).

Love is the first and the foremost force behind both the structures and the practices of monastic life. It moves both monks and oblates toward God. While oblates are not expected to duplicate the structures of monastic life, they promise to share in the values and the practices of it. The final article in the series will look at a few ways that oblates can share in the value and the practice of vigilance in their lives.

Fr. Justin DuVall, OSB, monk  
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

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and other items.

# Workers in the Vineyard

## Actions show we care for those in need



*John Brooks*

As oblates, our oblation included three promises before the archabbot, all the saints, all the assembled and God: stability of heart, fidelity to the

spirit of the monastic life, and obedience to the will of God. Each of us, while forming in our mother's womb, receive from God, our creator, an ember from his heart that ignites a fire in our hearts to light our way on our journey of life.

Called to transcend the world, we journey to reignite fire in the hearts of those who have become cold and

dark. The fire of our hearts feeds others by acts of kindness, caring, understanding, forgiveness, compassion and love.

It guides those in the depths of despair, taking them by the hand and walking beside them. Hearts firm on a foundation of service to others serve as models for others. We become a beacon of light, hope and faith.

Stability for me is found in bringing light, hope and faith. I volunteer at a hospital, food pantry and homeless shelter. With a heart founded firmly on God, I engage those often overlooked, forgotten and shunned by society.

Stability in an unstable world involves more than just words. It involves

being present in action and deed, standing side by side engaging those in need.

Sometimes it is the smallest acts of kindness and caring that reap the greatest rewards – a smile of friendship, a warm handshake, a friendly face or a kind word. We show by our actions that there is at least one person who cares.

Opening hearts to hope that is real, faith that is genuine, a journey that leads out of the darkness into the light, we stand firmly in our living the promises.

*John Brooks, oblate  
Columbus, IN*

# Reflections from the Wilderness

## Nurture the spirit by connecting with God

Many great things come in threes, such as BLTs (bacon, lettuce, tomato), or CRB (chicken, bacon, ranch), or even s'mores (chocolate, marshmallow, graham cracker). There is also what scientists say is required for physical life: water, which is two hydrogen molecules and one oxygen molecule. Our God is in the form of three as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The three I would like to write about is our mind, body and spirit. Of these three, spirit is primary. It connects us to the source of everything, the eternal field of consciousness. The more connected we remain, the more we enjoy the abundance of the universe. In a state of disconnection, we bring suffering and struggle.

I've noticed that some people study to gain knowledge, and some do physical exercises to build up their bodies. What I've learned is the deepest, most effective nurturing we can give ourselves is spiritual through connecting to God.

Seeing, reading and learning are amazing, but not a top priority for the spirit. Eating right, coupled with a good physical exercise regimen, is also productive; again, not mandatory for the spirit.

When we connect to the Father and the Son, through the Spirit, the body and the mind will ultimately follow in the same direction of healthy, positive growth. Take time for silence.

Connect to God through prayer and fasting. The more connected we are, the more we radiate God's will by loving God and loving our neighbor.

So, my challenge to you is to do some spiritual push-ups today and get connected through prayer, meditation and silence. You'll feel better after you connect with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

*Robert Branson, oblate  
Branchville, IN*

# The Busy Benedictine

## Sometimes staying put is the right move

*The Busy Benedictine is an occasional column about trying to be like a monk when you're working and taking care of kids.*



*Edward Castronova*

“I could go back home!” exclaims the wife. She was raised in a certain town and, years later, the husband gets a job offer in that town. For 20 years, she’s been dreaming of going back – of being with family again, and all her friends and old pathways. The comfort of home, of being stable again, like she used to be.

“Can we please not move?” says the 13-year-old. But you know, it is not a bad time to change schools, at the line between middle school and high school. The 17-year-old says he does not care, but he says that about everything. Still, he is on the way to college. A family move would have less impact.

To move or not to move! How many people dream of a promotion and advancement, a new opportunity. And how strongly does the economy pull at us. Yes, if we are good at what we do, the economy will always dangle more money and power and opportunity – so long as we are willing to move.

So, it came to a head. And I said, “I’m not taking the job. We’re not moving.” Woah – that’s head-of-household action, increasingly rare these days. “I’m saying it now, firmly, so that the boys don’t have to worry about it. We are not moving. Not now, not ever. I intend to die in this house, right here.”

Silence. The wife... it turns out she isn’t angry. Deep down, she knows that staying put is the right move. This place is home now.

Stability. You can’t be stable unless you stay put. And that’s just what St. Benedict says. A wise fellow, as always. Did you know that careful studies of human well-being show that we are most happy if we are deeply enmeshed in a community? But the economy doesn’t give a fig for those studies or St. Benedict’s wisdom. It tempts and tempts and tempts. “Move,” it says. “Move and I will give you riches and power.”

But people who have moved often, like me, know that what’s gone is gone. When you move, it’s as if everyone you used to know is dead. People always say, “We’ll keep in touch.” But they don’t, not really. A

card, a letter. It’s not the same. When someone moves away from my neighborhood, they sometimes say, “See you later.” I think, no–no, there’s no seeing you later. I’m watching you exit my life, never to return. You’re dead now, for all intents and purposes.

And I ask why? Why are you leaving this spot? What is so great about the other spot that it is worth severing all this human connection that you, your wife, your kids, had built? All that pain and loneliness, just for a better job.

Don’t do it. Stay put. You can’t go home again. This place, where you are right now – God put you there and St. Benedict wants you to stay there. Listen to them, not the world.

*Edward (Ted) Castronova, oblate  
Bloomington, IN*



*Joanna Harris congratulates Vicki Pettus after Pettus made her final oblation on December 7, 2019.*

# Considering the Psalms:

## Psalm 122 reminds us of the joy of our faith

I rejoiced when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.”

And now our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is built as a city bonded as one together.

It is there that the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord. For Israel’s witness it is to praise the name of the Lord.

There were set the thrones for judgment, the thrones of the house of David.

For the peace of Jerusalem pray, “May they prosper, those who love you.”

May peace abide in your walls, and security be in your towers.

For the sake of my family and friends, let me say, “Peace upon you.”

For the sake of the house of the Lord, our God, I will seek good things for you.

—*Psalm 122:1-9*



*Kathleen Polansky*

While chanting the psalms during Vespers, the familiar tones and rhythms encompassed and embraced me. My mind, the rhythm of

my breath, even my heartbeat, were synchronized with the cadence. I was suddenly absorbed in a memory of being in that very place many years past. The smells, the sounds, the chant were a hug of peace and calm in a world that tosses us and frequently leaves us in much upheaval.

Upon considering this, it occurred to me that Abraham was called by God to pack up his family and leave his homeland and kinfolk to travel to places unknown. What an upheaval that must have been. Moses, called by God, was to first return home, then pack up all his kin and leave for parts unknown.

Jesus, addressing his first followers, asked them to leave all and follow Him. Stability, at first glance, appears lost in these accounts. How can one know stability while God is demanding such change?

It was to the land of Canaan they were destined. The land where Jerusalem would be built as a city, the temple would be established as the dwelling place of God on earth and the place that would become a foundation of worship and forgiveness for centuries.

Jews would travel to Jerusalem to make sacrifice to God and seek forgiveness in its temple. Jerusalem, the place where Jesus Himself would become Temple and Sacrifice.

Psalm 122/121 is a hymn of joy. To proceed to the temple, one went in praise to the house of God. It was a great honor to go to Jerusalem and set foot in the house of the Lord. “I was glad when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord!’ Our feet are standing within your gates, O Jerusalem. Jerusalem – built as a city that is bound firmly together...”

Today Jerusalem remains the place of promise and stability for Jews, worship and sacredness for Islam, historicity and holiness for Christians. To stand in Jerusalem is to stand in the location of thousands of years of faith.

The *Rule of St. Benedict* calls us to “stability.” Stability calls us to be strong, to stand, to endure. We strive for a steadiness where we can be

home. Moments where people call us friend or loved one. Stability asks for more than surviving through another season or another year; rather it’s an opportunity to stand for something and be of value to others.

We look to the Church, our place of holy presence and stability, a place to steady our fears and our dreads and seek to listen to God’s call for us. Our stability is found in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the gift of the Holy Spirit promised through our sacraments, and the image of God in which we are created.

For those who make oblate promises, we choose a way of life rooted in the sacraments, sacred Scripture, prayer, service, and continuous relationship with our Triune God.

Our stability, joined through connection to this one monastery, upholds us in our living faith. It offers us a steady support in our upheavals and a nudge in our complacency. We find a hug of peace and calm within these walls and give thanks to the name of the Lord.

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate  
New Salisbury, IN*

# Einsiedeln founded on site of Meinrad's hermitage



Mark Plaiss

Long, long ago, and in a land far, far away, a hermit settled on the slope of a mountain to worship, praise and seek union with God. One day two ruffians pounced upon the hermit, convinced that he possessed valuable earthly treasures. The two intruders killed the hermit in their vain search for imagined precious items.

But the death of the hermit only inspired more men to come to that same lonely spot on the slope of the mountain to worship, praise and seek union with God. Word spread about these men. As the decades passed, more and more men flocked to the site on the slope of the mountain. One day it was decided that a monastery should be constructed at the site.

And so it was.

Centuries melded one into another, and the monastery grew in numbers, prestige and authority. The monastery became not only a center for the worship and praise of God, but also a center for learning and letters and music. Princes and emperors fawned over the monastery.

Then a great revolution erupted in the land. Would the monastery survive the strife and violence of revolution? One of the ideas for survival was to make a foundation, another monastery beyond the great slope of the mountain, a monastery beyond the reach of the acrimony of the moment. If the monastery were suppressed or destroyed, refuge would be found in this new foundation.

So the monastery sent a group of monks west, beyond the mountains, beyond the ocean, in fact, to a land in a new world, just north of a mighty river. In this land lived women, men and children who spoke and read the same language as the monks.

There the monks settled, and there they erected a monastery, and they named the monastery after that hermit who had settled on the slope of the mountain back in the old country. And there, like their brothers back in that old country, these monks tended to the spiritual, and sometimes corporal, needs of those women, men and children.

The monastery back in the old country did indeed weather the revolution. And today it welcomes the pilgrim, the curious and the befuddled. The daily rhythm of prayer and work continues. Over the centuries, the monastery and its church have been rebuilt many times, the most recent renovation being completed in 1997.

From a hermit to a handful of men to monks serving under a rule and an abbot. Many such places have come and gone over the centuries. Tintern and Rievaulx remain as ruins, the muse of poets and dreamers. Fontenay and Sénanque are for tourists, a destination for the bus and gift shop.

But the monastery of the hermit on the slope of the mountain remains. And it is not in ruins. Though tourists visit, the monks remain. The rococo church building and its environs a registered historical site.

The hermit was Meinrad. That monastery is Einsiedeln Abbey in Switzerland. Its foundation is Saint Meinrad Archabbey in Indiana.

And the *Opus Dei* goes on therein to this day.

Mark Plaiss, oblate novice  
Fox Lake, IL



Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB, places the scapular around the neck of Cody Jellison during the investiture rites on December 7, 2019.

# Meeting the Monks

## An interview with Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB



Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB

For Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB, stability has been a lifelong theme. Given that he came of age during the turbulent 1960s, that is no small statement.

From an early age, Fr. Harry knew the steadiness of a family deeply rooted in the small town of Bardstown, KY. Even while social upheaval raged elsewhere, Fr. Harry was well on his way to doubling down on a tradition dating back centuries.

The spiritual trajectory of Fr. Harry's life seemed to be set early. By the eighth grade, he was already discerning his priestly vocation, entering the Archdiocese of Louisville's St. Thomas Minor Seminary for high school students and college freshmen and sophomores.

Where would the future priest do his theological training? "My bishop made me come here and study as a junior in college," Fr. Harry says of coming to Saint Meinrad School of Theology in 1967. Without skipping a beat, he then joined the monastic community four years later.

Fr. Harry describes the lengthy process of becoming a full-fledged monk: three months as a candidate, then one year as a novice, then three years as a junior monk, and then final profession. Later, when he served as novice and junior master from 1996 to 2008, Fr. Harry guided potential monks through this same sequence of formation that he had experienced.

An in-depth reading of the *Rule of St. Benedict* forms the core of that formation, especially Chapter 58, "The Procedure for Receiving Brothers." Fr. Harry would seek to "help them understand themselves, how they need to, and can, conform themselves to the community ... how to become part of this group."

The monastery's day, punctuated at regular intervals by the calls to prayer, can reveal to candidates their suitability for such a life. Some, he said, adapt well while others "don't quite mesh" with a life that many might see as confining.

It's all a part of discovering that sense of place and belonging. "Stability tells

you where your home is," he says. "Concrete forms of place and community ground a person." Physical structures such as church buildings have a way of getting that message across like no other.

Long a fan of church architecture, Fr. Harry especially likes churches of Romanesque construction. During his post-graduate studies in Rome, he found a favorite in 12th-century Ve'zelay Abbey in France's Burgundy region.

"You feel like you're standing in the strength of God," he says of the solidly built church. Fr. Harry has put his keen interest in sacred spaces to good use as a member of the Saint Meinrad Archabbey church renovation team.

Rather than limiting a person, anchoring oneself to a certain community can be incredibly freeing. On top of his considerable academic credentials, over the years Fr. Harry has also studied 10 languages, published over 40 original hymns, produced three Gregorian chant CDs, and pursued art as a hobby for the past 10 years.

As associate professor of Scripture, he teaches core courses in Old Testament narrative and poetry as well as electives on covenant and the Psalms. He also teaches courses in Greek, Hebrew and Latin – once again, ancient languages still being mined for wisdom today.

For Fr. Harry, stability has been a very fruitful way of life indeed.

*Angie McDonald, oblate  
Huntingburg, IN*

# Liturgy of the Hours

## resources found in Alcuin Oblate Library



Ann Smith

When we become oblates of Saint Meinrad, we promise stability of heart, fidelity to the spirit of monastic life, and obedience to the will of

God. Daily praying the Liturgy of the Hours as best we can in our lives, which is one of our duties as oblates, helps us keep those promises.

Praying the Liturgy of the Hours is an excellent way of sanctifying our day and sanctifying our lives. We cannot become people of prayer if we do not pray. To help you with the Liturgy of the Hours, the Alcuin Oblate Library presents:

### Liturgy of the Hours Q & A

**Q.** *Where are the books about the Liturgy of the Hours in the Alcuin Oblate Library?*

The call number we use is 264.024. (Your local library might use a different call number. Libraries use the call numbers that fit their collection the best. A very Benedictine thing to do.)

**Q.** *Are there books to inspire me to become more conscientious about praying the Liturgy of the Hours?*

Yes. There are many books to help you understand the impact the Liturgy of the Hours can have on your life. Two examples are: *Seven Sacred Pauses* by Macrina Wiederkehr, OSB, and *Music of Silence* by David Steindl-Rast, OSB.

**Q.** *I want to use the four-volume Liturgy of the Hours, but it is so confusing! What can I do?*

The Alcuin Oblate Library has books to teach you how to use the four-volume set as well as the single-volume *Christian Prayer*. One excellent example is *The Divine Office for Dodos* by Madeline Pecora Nugent.

**Q.** *How many different versions of the Liturgy of the Hours are there? And can we use them?*

Many. And yes. Many religious orders have developed their own liturgies based on their rules or the needs of their individual communities. We own many different versions. You are free to use them to enrich your prayer life. Some examples are:

- *The Rhythm of Life: Celtic Daily Prayer* by David Adam. Adam is a former vicar on the island of Lindisfarne. This book contains Morning, Midday, Evening and Night Prayer for one week.
- *That God May be Glorified: An Inclusive Language Setting of the Liturgy of the Hours*. From the Benedictine Sisters of Erie.

- *Glenstal Book of Prayer: a Benedictine Prayer Book*. (An excellent liturgy to use when time is short. Very short.)
- *Christian Prayer*. (The large-print edition of the one-volume Liturgy of the Hours)
- *Benedictine Daily Prayer: A Short Breviary*. (From St John's Abbey, intended for oblates)
- *The People's Companion to the Breviary* from the Carmelites of Indianapolis. (A two-volume liturgy using inclusive language. A four-week psalter for Morning, Daytime and Evening prayers with seasonal prayers and special feasts and commemorations.)

I hope this helps you in your journey to becoming a person of prayer. And I hope to see you in the Alcuin Oblate Library!

Ann Smith, oblate  
Gabhanna, OH



Ellen Micheletti prays before making her final oblation on December 7, 2019.

# Growing deeper in faith with music



Br. Michael Reyes, OSB

St. Pope John Paul II's *Fides et Ratio* teaches us that God reveals Himself to his creation, and we understand these revelations

through knowledge and

reason. Through the Scriptures of the prophets and the events that have transpired in history, we use reason to discover God's revelation.

However, God not only reveals Himself through the Scriptures, but also manifests Himself in his other creations, including sound. Through the organization of sound, composers and music theorists create different techniques and sound colors to deepen our understanding of God's love for us.

In musical pieces containing sacred ideas, the analyses of these compositions and the music theories of musical creation are tools that help the listener grow deeper in faith. The analyses of sacred music compositions with or without text demonstrate how the critical listener can flourish in faith and make their prayers more profound.

George Frideric Handel's most notable work, "Messiah," uses an array of scriptural texts. One of the choral songs from this oratorio, "For Unto Us A Child Is Born," employs the text from Isaiah 9:6. Handel's use of fundamental Baroque compositional techniques, including motivic imitation and running 16th notes, enhance the meaning of the text. With the critical listening of the audience, Handel's compositional

techniques unfold the deeper meaning of the Scripture.



Please scan QRC1 to listen to the recording before proceeding.

One can notice the extended 16th note figure on the word "born" that lasts for a couple of measures. This distinguishable musical gesture occurs only when the choir sings the word "born." Handel could have utilized a different musical idea or could have placed the 16th note melodic gesture in a different word. However, Handel chooses to reinforce the meaning of the word "born" by assigning the 16th note melodic idea to it.

This melodic gesture delays the conclusion of the word "born," and Handel provides a lengthy anticipation to its closure. The association of this musical figure to the word "born" helps the listener to experience the Jews' enduring wait for the birth of the Messiah.

Another aspect of Handel's technique is the dotted rhythm of the phrase "and the government shall be upon His shoulders." Handel builds up this text by using an ascending melody together with a repeating dotted rhythm. It provides an opportunity for Handel to create an atmosphere of anticipation to the climax of the text: "Wonderful, Counselor, the Almighty God..."

Upon reaching this section, Handel further complements the pinnacle of the text with a change of rhythm and texture. The motivic support from the timpani, together with the rhythmic unison of the entire choir, creates a very majestic sound that amplifies the importance of the text.

The musical and textural emphases on this text establish the climax of the musical phrase. With these compositional techniques, Handel persuades the listener of the significance of the words "Wonderful, Counselor, the Almighty God..."

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's "Ave Verum Corpus" uses text originating from Richeneau.



Please scan QRC2 to listen to the recording before proceeding.

*Hail, true body  
born of the Virgin Mary,  
Who truly suffered, sacrificed  
on the Cross for man,  
Whose pierced side overflowed  
with water and blood,  
Be for us a foretaste  
In the test of death.<sup>1</sup>*

The piece starts with a bed of muted strings playing chordal arpeggios in a slow tempo. The choir enters and appears to emanate from the conclusion of the arpeggio introduction of the strings. The choir sings mostly chords in rhythmic unison for almost half of the song, which is almost three-fourths of the text of the prayer.

Mozart employs a very homophonic texture, longer rhythms, a slower tempo, and a lyrical melody to evoke the sadness and frailty of Christ's body. From the beginning until the word "sanguine" (blood), Mozart underscores the meaning of the text by using these techniques.

Upon reaching the text "*Esto nobis praegustatum*," Mozart shifts from chordal harmony to motivic imitation. Mozart practices text

painting to emphasize the meaning of the word “foretaste.” The occurrences of this text in the other voices at different times intensify the meaning of the word. The motivic imitation shifts back to chordal harmony on the rearticulation of the text “*in mortis examine.*”

Mozart prolongs the word by augmenting the melody on the syllable “*mo*” of “*mortis.*” Mozart heightens the melodic line with an ascending melody and serves as the climax of the piece. Mozart asserts the importance of the word “death” in the text with these compositional tools.

Having Scripture in music is not the only way to strengthen prayer. Music without text can also be an opportunity for prayer to develop. The overture from Ludwig van Beethoven’s “Mount of Olives” and Olivier Messiaen’s “Amen de l’agonie de Jesus” are the two primary examples.



Please scan QRC3 to listen to the recording before proceeding.

The main purpose of an overture is to establish the mood and to hear the thematic materials of the piece. Beethoven’s overture from the “Mount of Olives” begins with minor arpeggios. Beethoven extends this musical gesture to establish a somber sound. He even sets the overture in a minor key to magnify further the melancholy music.

To give more dissonance to the sound, Beethoven juxtaposes fully diminished 7th harmonies against the minor tonality of the piece. The contrasting tonal areas of these two harmonies provide a vulnerable mood that Beethoven wants to establish.

The dark sonority of these harmonies informs the listener of what is to come.

Beethoven also uses a rhythmic motif that is associated with funeral marches. These marches typically contain repeating dotted note rhythms in a slow tempo. This depicts the slow somber walk when following a casket in a funeral march.

Beethoven uses this rhythm to help the listener associate the music with the death of Christ. It foreshadows what happens to Christ after the events on the Mount of Olives.

In the middle of the overture, Beethoven uses a descending minor scale as a motif. The development of this motif is mostly played in a minor or diminished scale. Descending scales of this sonority are typically associated with wailing or deep sighs. Beethoven employs this motif in the overture to depict the wailing and deep sighs in Christ’s sorrowful passion.

As the overture ends, Beethoven modulates to a different key and shifts the tonality from minor to major. It is unusual for a somber piece to have a major key; however, Beethoven uses the technique to anticipate Christ’s arrival to the garden. Beethoven sets up a pleasant mood because Christ is about to spend some time with the Father. As the music progresses, Beethoven reveals the sad state of Christ through the minor key change.

Messiaen’s “Amen de l’agonie de Jesus” uses two pianos that represent God and Jesus.



Please scan QRC4 and listen only to Messiaen’s “Amen de l’agonie de Jesus” before proceeding.

An interesting aspect of Messiaen’s depiction of the Agony in the Garden is the use of rhythmic imitations. Messiaen adopts this technique to unite God and Jesus in the music. As the piece progresses, the rhythms of the two pianos become apart from each other and their melodies move in contrary motion. This technique builds a conflict between God and Jesus.

The pianos play softly as the piece approaches the end. This signifies the acceptance of Jesus to his agonizing fate. The slow repetitive low C’s at the end of the piece is Messiaen’s representation of a death bell toll. Even though the harmonies used by Messiaen are uncommon to the listener, Messiaen tries to evoke a feeling of uncertainty and surrender through rhythmic imitations and certain motivic elements. These can help the listener understand Messiaen’s musical dramaturgy in the Agony in the Garden through his musical processes.

The analyses of sacred music compositions and the different theories of musical creation can strengthen the listener’s faith and make their prayers more profound. Music compositions with or without sacred text can therefore present how God reveals Himself to the listener of the music. St. Augustine amplifies this by saying music is the science or the sense of proper modulation is likewise given by God’s generosity to mortals having rational souls in order to lead them to higher things.<sup>2</sup>

Br. Michael Reyes, OSB, monk  
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

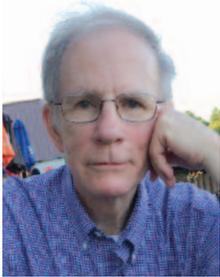
Br. Michael has a doctorate degree in music composition from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

<sup>1</sup> [www.users.on.net/~algonon/aveverum/translation.html](http://www.users.on.net/~algonon/aveverum/translation.html) (Accessed on Dec 11, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo. Epistle 161. *De Origine Animae Hominis*, 1,2; PL XXXIII, 725.

# Virtue Ethics:

## Aristotle and St. Benedict's Rule



Bill Hamrick

Throughout St. Benedict's *Rule*,<sup>1</sup> there are many rules for the organization and governance of a monastery and for the material and spiritual welfare of its cenobite

residents. Yet rules are not what is central to monastic life. What is most important is that the enforcement of rules always be guided by an ever-present concern for the monks' souls, and that view is rooted in an older tradition of virtue ethics that hearkens back to Plato, and especially to Aristotle (384-322 BCE).<sup>2</sup>

I am not certain how much St. Benedict knew of the latter's thought, or indeed how much was known in his lifetime (480-547 CE), because *the* intellectual development in 13th-century Europe consisted of the rediscovery of Aristotle's thought. Rather, I want only to show here that the *Rule* presupposes and expresses much that is congenial to Aristotle's descriptions of moral experience and civic life.

First, however, let us put aside two major differences between them. The first one is that Aristotle advances a purely naturalistic ethics based on empirical evidence. In his view, ethics is indissolubly linked to psychology and biology, and the evidence showed him that human beings have the inherent capacity to lead morally good lives. Therefore, he could not have agreed with St. Benedict's statement in the Prologue of the *Rule* that the good in monks is not from themselves, but from God.

Likewise, he would have objected to much in Chapter 7 concerning humility, especially the seventh degree, as irrational and thus self-destructive.<sup>3</sup> A second difference is that, because human nature is inherently social ("Man is born for citizenship," he wrote), Aristotle would not have understood the desire to be an anchorite or considered it a legitimate form of spiritual fulfillment.

Despite these differences, Aristotle's view that human nature is essentially social creates a fundamental agreement between his vision of social life and St. Benedict's view of monastic life for cenobites and his distrust of sarabaites and vagabonds. The model for both men is an organic unity, a cohesive whole of interdependent participants in which what is morally good for the whole is therefore good for each of its "parts." Conversely, the whole increases in goodness as its participants increase in goodness.

For Aristotle, the name for that goodness is virtue, which is the internal excellence of something – how it performs its specific function well. Moral virtues – those of "character" (*ēthos*) – refer to the proper development of practical reasoning governing the non-rational part of the soul – drives, passions and desires. The objects of moral virtues are feelings, the use of external goods, and social life generally.

As *The New York Times* columnist David Brooks expresses it, "Aristotle teaches us that being a good person is not mainly about learning moral rules and following them. It is about performing social roles well – being a good parent or teacher or lawyer or friend."<sup>4</sup> The successful development

of a virtuous life for Aristotle consists of practical wisdom (*phronēsis*).

How, then, do we become wise? Aristotle's answer is that virtue is the product of developing habits of acting virtuously, and we do this by seeking habitual moderation in our feelings and decisions and thus avoid extremes of excess and deficiency. Virtue "is a mean between two vices, one of excess and one of deficiency" (*Ibid.*, 44), and ethics (*ethike*) "results from habit [i.e., of *ēthos*]: hence its name 'ethical,' slightly varied from '*ethos*'" (EN 33).

An example of moderation in feelings would be fear: too much fear in a particular situation would amount to the excess of cowardice. Too little fear, the deficiency, would be foolhardiness. The proper amount of fear, the virtuous state, would be courage.

An example of moderation in actions would be giving discretionary income to charity: too much would amount to being a spendthrift and, at the extreme, recklessness: if you give away all your money, you may end up needing charity yourself. But if you give too little, then you're stingy. The right amount equals praiseworthy generosity.

Since the only way to find the mean is by experience – effectively trial and error – Aristotle insists that "it is hard work to find what is intermediate" (EN 51). It is very easy to become angry, he points out, "and anyone can do it; but doing it to the right person, in the right amount, at the right time, for the right end, and in the right way is no longer easy, nor can everyone do it. Hence [doing these things] well is rare, praiseworthy, and fine." (*Ibid.*)

And not only do we need experience, but also we need an honest appraisal of our desires and inclinations. As we shall see, St. Benedict says much the same thing about how the abbot should make decisions.

Before that, though, let us note that, in the entire *Rule*, there is only one monk besides the abbot who receives anything like a full description, and he illustrates Aristotle's conception of the morally virtuous person. In Chapter 31, St. Benedict states that the cellarer should be "a man who is wise and mature of character, temperate, not greatly given to eating, not haughty, nor turbulent, nor offensive, nor indolent, nor wasteful. ... Let him not be covetous, or wasteful, or a squanderer of the goods of the monastery. He should do all things in moderation and according to the bidding of his Abbot."

St. Benedict's descriptions of the abbot's functions and decision-making illustrate well Aristotle's

notions of virtue and how to achieve it. Chapter 1 tells us that the abbot must be an exemplar, a virtuous person, who engages in a "twofold manner of teaching" by actions as well as preaching. Further, as Aristotle knew, his decision-making must be contextual, "suiting his actions to circumstances," "adapting himself to the dispositions of many." Prudence requires him to "administer all things wisely and justly," which entails doing "nothing without counsel."

Further, excommunication, the subject of Chapter 24, must be "measured according to the gravity of the fault." Proportionality must be achieved, and its estimation "left to the judgment of the Abbot." Likewise, Chapter 30 tells us that, in regard to the correction of young boys, "Every age and understanding should have its proper measure," which also applies to Chapter 37, "Of old men and children," and Chapter 40, in which the author hesitates "to determine the measurement of nourishment for

others," and only states that moderation is to be observed in the consumption of wine.

Moderation is also necessary in assigning burdens because not all monks have the strength to "have the aspect of Lenten observance" all year round (Chapter 49). And finally, the abbot should "not be turbulent and overanxious, over-exacting and headstrong, jealous and prone to suspicion, for otherwise he will never have rest" (Chapter 64) – all of which Aristotle would count as vices of excess.

The abbot should be guided by "models of discretion, the mother of virtue ... [and] so temper all things so that the strong may still find something they will do with zeal, and the weak may not be disheartened." Aristotle, I believe, could not have said it better.

*Bill Hamrick, oblate  
St. Louis, MO*

<sup>1</sup> Citations from this text come from *The Holy Rule of Our Most Holy Father Saint Benedict*, Edited by the Benedictine Monks of St. Meinrad Archabbey (St. Meinrad, IN: Grail Publications, 2nd printing of the revised edition, 1956).

<sup>2</sup> Aristotle usually walked around his Athenian school, called the Lyceum, while lecturing to students whose notes we have. Out of those notes have come two major texts on ethics whose authorship is certain: the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemean Ethics*. Citations here are from the former, translated by Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1985), hereinafter abbreviated as "EN."

<sup>3</sup> I heard these exact criticisms in a recent discussion group examining the seventh degree of humility. The consensus was that David, whose Psalm is at issue in this passage, was having a really bad day.

<sup>4</sup> David Brooks, "Why Elders Smile," *The New York Times* OP-ED, Friday, December 5, 2014, A 27.



## Oblates invited to join Holy Land pilgrimage

Br. Maurus Zoeller, OSB, invites any interested oblates to join him on a 10-day trip to the Holy Land. Travelers will visit Bethlehem, Haifa, Tiberius, Nazareth and Jerusalem.

Travel dates are March 16-25, 2021.  
Cost is \$3,599 from New York.

For information, contact Br. Maurus at  
(812) 357-6674 or  
mzoeller@saintmeinrad.edu.

# A careful watch: Vigilance in the *Rule of St. Benedict*

In December, oblates gathered at Saint Meinrad Archabbey to spend a weekend contemplating vigilance with Fr. Mateo Zamora, OSB. He began the retreat with a reminder, in the words of Henri Nouwen, that “Life is Advent.” It is a continual waiting – a looking forward to things to come.

Fr. Mateo urged us, however, to look inward even as we look *forward*, and to always ask these four questions:

- How long did you wait?
- What were you waiting for?
- Why did you wait?
- How did you wait?

In the second conference, “Vigil for the Sick and Dying,” we were reminded that we are not waiting for

death. Rather, we are waiting for *Christ*. If we are waiting for death, we are waiting for the end. If we are waiting for Christ, however, we are waiting for the beginning.

The *Rule* exhorts, “Care of the sick must rank above and before all else.” Fr. Mateo urged us to always share both grief and joy, even amid sickness and death. “Sharing multiplies joy and divides sorrow when what we are waiting for finally arrives.”

The last three conferences, on vigilance over our words, our actions and our possessions, were a reflection on accountability, humility and simplicity. We were reminded that much of the damage in people’s lives is caused by words. Euripides

counsels, “Silence is wisdom’s first reply.”

We are to listen intently and speak so as to allow God to speak through us. Our actions should reflect both reality and God’s dream for our lives, actions that make the most of the gifts He has given. Finally, as the *Rule* exhorts, we are to keep death always in mind. Our lives should be simple, uncluttered. We should always leave space for the Holy Spirit to do his work.

Again, finishing in the words of Nouwen, Fr. Mateo reminded us that “Waiting is a period of learning.” Did you wait in service?

*Audra Douglas, oblate  
Evansville, IN*

## Retreat helps novices see clearer picture of oblate life

Happy New Year to my fellow oblate novices and our oblate family. What better way to begin 2020 than to attend an oblate novice retreat at Saint Meinrad Archabbey? Especially one led by Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, OSB.

We began Friday evening with instruction on how to pray like a Benedictine, matching our pace and volume to that of the monks. Following their lead by slowing our pace, lowering our voices and integrating periods of silence, we blend our worship into one united voice. It was beautiful, and I have continued that slower, more deliberate pace in my prayer life. Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, told us, “The silence is the perfect complement to the word.”

The focus of the weekend was finding stability in our lives as oblate novices. Our goal was to find a balance through our prayer, work and leisure. We are called to strip away those layers of sin and sloth that accumulate through our lives. I think of Adam and Eve, before they fell, standing naked before God without shame. We are called to be vulnerable and exposed, so that we rely on God and the monastic community.

Through this transformation, we can forge a new identity as an oblate novice in Christ Jesus. Through St. Benedict’s *Rule* and God’s grace, along with the liturgy, tools of good works and steps of humility, we have the means to be formed into the Word.

At the close of the weekend, a handful of us gathered to share one last meal together before heading our separate ways. I remarked to Br. Stanley, and the others gathered there, that prior to the weekend, I felt like I had the pieces of a puzzle but could not figure out how to assemble them.

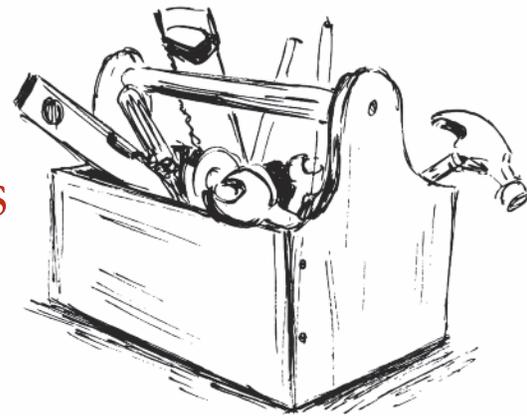
That is what the weekend did for me. Not only do I have a clearer picture of the oblate life, but practical ways to incorporate it into everyday life, as we strive, as St. Benedict charges, to bring a good work to completion.

*Sonia Keepes, oblate novice  
Mt. Carmel, IL*

# The Oblate Toolbox

## Maybe it's time to get back to basics

*"These, then, are the tools of the spiritual craft ... the workshop where we are to toil faithfully at all these tasks is the enclosure of the monastery and stability in the community."* – Rule of St. Benedict 4:75, 78



Angie McDonald

Do you remember playing on the merry-go-round down at the local park? It was great fun to try and hold on while your friends made it spin faster and faster. The closer you were to the edge, the stronger the centrifugal force that tried to throw you off. If you inched your way toward the center, however, that same force began to lose its grip on you. If you made it to the middle of the spinning disk, that force would have lessened to almost nothing.

What does this have to do with our oblate promise of stability of heart? Daily life can sometimes feel like that merry-go-round. We don't live in a monastery, but perhaps life would be less hectic and harried if we did. We

don't have bells to call us to our morning and evening prayer, but perhaps we would feel less distracted if we did. We don't live under an abbot at home, but perhaps life would be less complicated if we did.

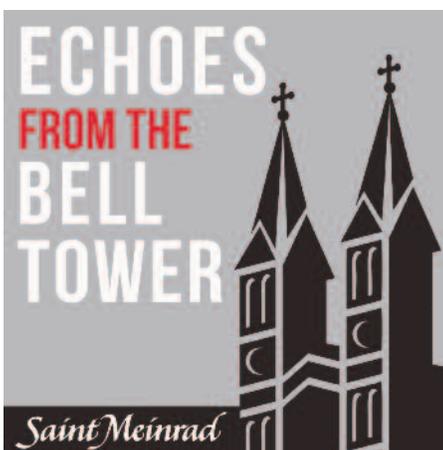
Do we have trouble maintaining the Lauds, Vespers and Compline hours of prayer? Perhaps we need to give ourselves an audible signal (cell phone alarm?) that calls us to prayer, like the Archabbey Church bells.

How are we doing with our *lectio divina*? Setting aside a time each day to read, reflect upon and interact with Scripture helps keep us on track. Are we feeling restless, bored or spiritually dry? Perhaps the honeymoon has ended and the first flush of infatuation with the monastic life has faded.

In that case, St. Benedict urges us to stay on the path that leads to holiness, not readily abandoning our calling as oblates. My mother used to say to me, "Put those blinders on!" Sometimes we simply have too many options that tend to splinter our focus into a million pieces, and we begin to lose our grip on sticking with the program.

Again, it's back to basics. Moment by moment, hour by hour, and day by day, we will grow in stability as we consciously choose to do those things that keep us rooted in Christ.

Angie McDonald, oblate  
Huntingburg, IN



**FIND EPISODES AT**  
[www.saintmeinrad.edu/echoes](http://www.saintmeinrad.edu/echoes)

## We want you and your articles!

The *Benedictine Oblate* invites you to submit news and information about your chapter, write an article about your Benedictine journey, submit a book review for the Reading Room column, or send in photos of you or your chapter engaged in oblate activities.

All submissions must include your name, city and state, and an explanation of how it connects to the theme. Submissions will be edited and published as they fit the theme or need of the newsletter. Articles of 500 words or less are suggested.

Please send all submissions to Kathleen Polansky at [kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com](mailto:kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com).

### Upcoming themes and submission dates:

Summer 2020 – Fidelity (Final date of submission May 1)  
Fall 2020 – Obedience (Final date of submission Aug. 1)  
Winter 2021 – Humility (Final date of submission Nov. 1)

# Stability: A basic tenet of spiritual life



Thomas J. Rillo

Stability as a basic tenet in the way of life was a real concern for St. Benedict. Whenever he sent his monks on a mission that required traveling away

from the monastery, he always sent an older, mature monk with the younger monks. He knew there were temptations beyond the monastery, a sort of “the grass is always greener on the other side of the fence.”

I am a good example of this instability. As a teacher and professor at six institutions of higher learning, I moved to five colleges and universities before finding stability. There is something to be said about remaining in one place, committing to a specific place or situation. There is always a loss with instability.

Long-term relationships dissolve, such as ties with family, colleagues and friends, and the community. I initiated the moves because I felt there was more chance of job improvement and I would be a better provider for my family. Doing this stole the stability of my family with the community.

Numerous times I watched my daughter’s horses leave the middle of the pasture and move to the fence to nibble on the grass on the other side – the same grass that grew in the middle of their pasture. Society today is characterized by a lack of stability. Families are uprooted so that someone can climb up the vocational ladder.

The easy thing to do is to run away from that which is seen as the wrong situation, replete with seemingly

unsolvable remedies. I see this happening in my church. Parishioners leave the church because they dislike the priest, or they are not being fed by him. Instead of facing the problem, real or not, they run. This is not stability. Monks in a monastery are confronted with problems, yet their first response is not flight. They live by the *Rule*.

The word “stability” comes from “stable.” To associate the word “stable” with an individual, we attest to the fact that one is unwavering and stays the course, remaining loyal and totally committed and steadfast.

The dictionary uses these words: firmly established, mentally and emotionally healthy, steady in purpose and resistant to change. I especially

like resistant to change. This is what Benedict in his wisdom was trying to maintain in the minds of his monks. The grass was not greener outside the monastery.

The monks become resistant to change and firmly rooted to the monastery. To grow, there must be roots to provide nourishment for growth. How does this apply to Benedictine oblates? We are called to maintain stability through prayer. Reading the *Rule* and praying the Liturgy of the Hours are excellent ways of maintaining stability in Benedictine spirituality. Periodic travel to retreats and other events by the monastery of their oblation can also maintain stability.

Thomas J. Rillo, oblate  
Bloomington, IN



Scott McKee (fourth from the right), of the Muncie Oblate Chapter, received his First Communion on January 3. From left are other chapter members, Carol Sniadecki, Theresa Riddle, Dan Dalton (not an oblate), Fr. Dennis Goth, Scott McKee, Debbie Miller, Mike Burns and Patsy Butler. Scott and Fr. Dennis are the oblate chapter coordinators.

# OBLATE NEWS

Oblate Director Janis Dopp, Fr. Meinrad Brune, OSB, and Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, OSB, spoke to the monastic community about the oblate community on February 5.

## OBLATIONS

**December 7, 2019** – Edward Johnson, Nashville, TN; David Lacey, Hermitage, TN; Ellen Micheletti, Bowling Green, KY; David Miller, Venice, FL; Mark Milliron and John Reynolds, Cincinnati, OH; Thomas Murray, Union, KY; Beverly Okey and William Okey, Newburgh, IN; Mary Ortwein and Vicki Pettus, Frankfort, KY; Matthew Whisman, Louisville, KY. ♦

## INVESTITURES

**December 7, 2019** – Mary Desire-Vibert, Sharon, OH; Alex Dye, West Liberty, OH; Cody Jellison, West Baden Springs, IN; Fr. Michael Keucher, Shelbyville, IN; Richard Koerper, Auburn, IL; Jonathan Nord, Kristi Nord and Philip Schraner, Jasper, IN; Rebecca Olsen, Yorkville, IL; William Sabota, Schwenksville, PA; Jonathan Stotts, Nashville, TN; Lynn Leon White, Paoli, IN. ♦

## DEATHS

Rita Marie Christ of Zanesville, OH, February 22, 2018

Margaret Schroder of Bronx, NY, December 17, 2019

Elisa M. Testa of Landing, NJ, July 30, 2019 ♦

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**April 24-26, 2020:** Oblate Council and Finance Committee meetings

**June 8-11, 2020:** Saint Meinrad Study Days with Fr. Thomas Gricoski, OSB, as the presenter on “Recollection”

**June 13, 2020:** Investitures and final oblations

**July 11, 2020:** Saint Meinrad Day of Recollection with Fr. Christian Raab, OSB, presenting on the topic, “Theology and Spirituality”

## ANNIVERSARIES

**25th:** Remedios Anne Cabanilla of New York, NY; Mary E. Gallagher of Shelbyville, IN; Helen Kite of Indianapolis, IN

**60th:** John Busam of Huron, OH; Joyce Greenwood of Tell City, IN; Angelo Musone of Lady Lake, FL

**70th:** Elizabeth Wollenmann of Ferdinand, IN ♦

## VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office were Br. Stanley Rother Wagner, OSB, Ann Smith, Mary Campanelli, Fr. Mateo Zamora, OSB, Br. Michael Reyes, OSB, Novice Simon Holden, OSB, Becky Boyle, Marie Kobos, Michelle Blalock, Ron DeMarco, Al Kovacs, Jennie Latta, Holly Vaughan, Craig Medlyn and Mark Milliron. ♦

# Smugmug

For more photos of  
Saint Meinrad events, visit:

<http://saint-meinrad.smugmug.com>

## Oblate life: Annual personal evaluation

To see how well you are fulfilling your vocation as an oblate of Saint Meinrad Archabbey, reflect on the following questions. These questions are for your personal consideration and evaluation, so that you may see how you are growing as an oblate. We are convinced that if you sincerely reflect on these questions, you will deepen your relationship with God. And in doing so, you are truly growing in Benedictine spirituality as an oblate.

1. What have I done during the past year to continue ongoing formation as an oblate?
2. What do I plan to do during the coming year?
3. How well do I see myself living the oblate promises: (Rate yourself on a scale of 1–5, with 1 as “needing improvement” and 5 as “doing well.”)
  - Stability of heart? 1 2 3 4 5
  - Fidelity to the spirit of the monastic life? 1 2 3 4 5
  - Obedience to the will of God? 1 2 3 4 5
4. How well do I see myself fulfilling the oblate duties:
  - Praying the Liturgy of the Hours? 1 2 3 4 5
  - Reading from the *Rule of St. Benedict*? 1 2 3 4 5
  - Daily practice of *lectio divina*? 1 2 3 4 5
  - Participating in the Sacraments of the Eucharist and Reconciliation or in my own faith tradition’s prayer? 1 2 3 4 5
  - Attentiveness to God’s presence in my ordinary, daily life? 1 2 3 4 5
5. In what ways can I offer my time, talent and treasure to the services of the Oblate Community of Saint Meinrad Archabbey?
6. If I need to improve in any of these areas, what do I plan to do?



**Benedictine  
Oblate** QUARTERLY

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St. Meinrad, IN 47577

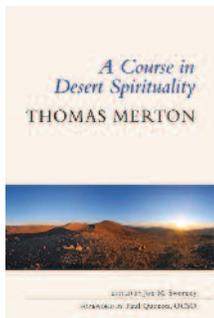
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## Reading Room

*A Course in Desert Spirituality* by Thomas Merton with Jon M. Sweeney, editor. The Liturgical Press, 2019.



As Benedictine oblates, many of us have read about the Desert Fathers and Abbot Anthony. The Desert Fathers were a group of young men who followed St. Anthony into the Egyptian desert. Like Abbot Anthony, they wanted to escape the evils of urban living to have the time to grow closer to God.

These hermits offered blunt, simple answers to spiritual seekers, and they were believers of the words of Jesus Christ. They lived a simple life in hermitage huts and followed the adage, “Keep to your cell and your cell will teach you all things.”

Editor Sweeney has taken the 15 lectures delivered to the young monks at the Abbey of Gethsemani by Thomas Merton to demonstrate what Merton believed was the means to spiritual life. This collection of lectures gets to the basics of Merton’s belief that monastic wisdom and

spirituality are applicable for everyone. This is an opportunity for oblates to gain insight into Thomas Merton and learn from one of the 20th-century’s greatest Catholic teachers.

Merton reveals how today’s materialistic and superficial world can learn from early desert spirituality. He takes us on a journey into the desert to meet many Desert Mothers and Fathers and understand and grow with desert spirituality.

The study materials at the back of the book include primary source readings and thoughtful questions for reflection and discussion, suitable for oblate group discussion. It is similar to what the Trappist novices heard from the master. The book is an essential text for any student of Christian desert spirituality.

Through the brilliant mind of Thomas Merton, the book will take you on a journey that will make the Desert Fathers and Mothers come alive. And it will introduce to the reader one of the greatest Christian Catholic teachers of the last century.

*Thomas J. Rillo, oblate  
Bloomington, IN*