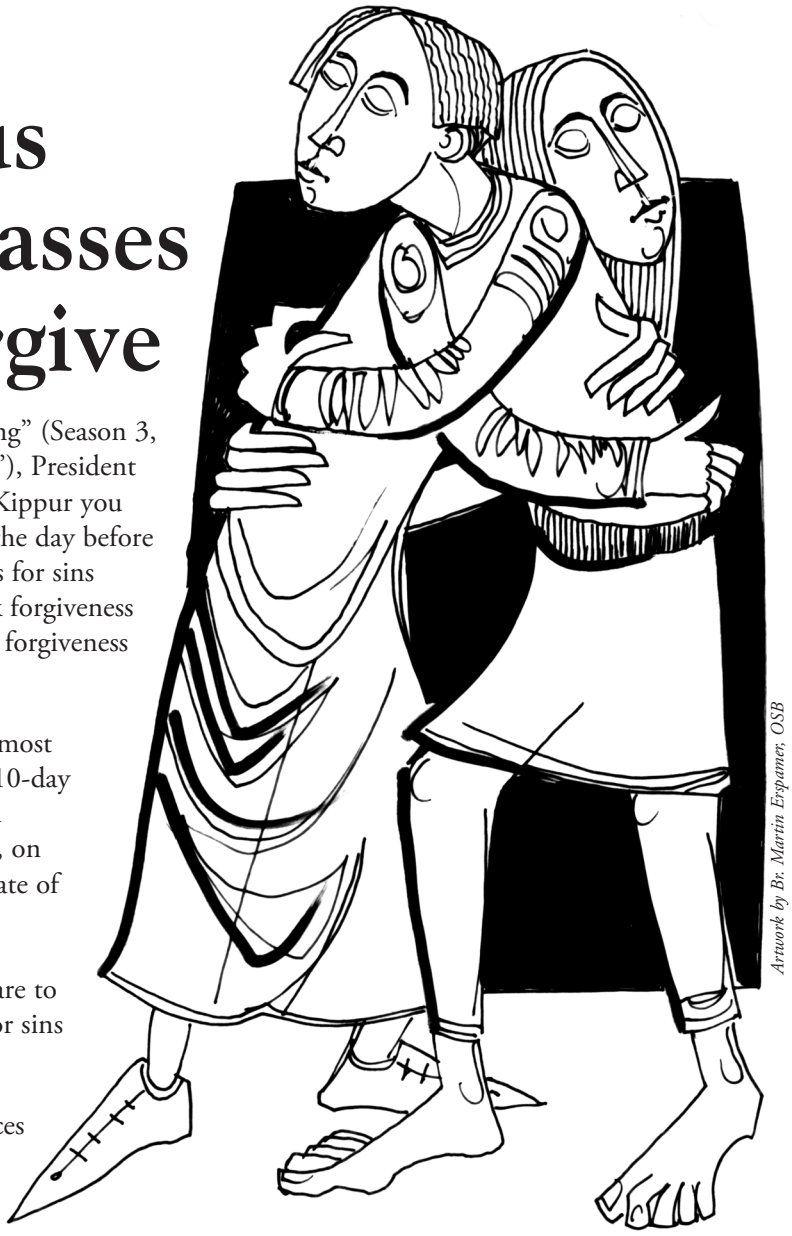
Benedictine Oblate
QUARTERLY
Saint Meinrad

# Forgive us our trespasses *as* we forgive



*Artwork by Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB*

In a quote from "The West Wing" (Season 3, Episode 5: "On the Day Before"), President Jed Bartlet explains, "On Yom Kippur you ask forgiveness of God, but on the day before Yom Kippur you ask forgiveness for sins against people." One cannot ask forgiveness from God, until one has sought forgiveness from others.

In Judaism, Yom Kippur is the most important holiday. It follows a 10-day preparation that begins on Rosh Hashanah. Tradition holds that, on Yom Kippur, God decides the fate of each individual, so Jews are encouraged to expiate the sins committed the past year. They are to make amends and ask pardon for sins committed.

Numerous rituals and observances accompany these High Holy Days. Part of the tradition involves Erev Yom Kippur. On the eve (Erev) of Yom Kippur, one must complete seeking forgiveness from persons whom you have harmed. Included is the understanding that sins committed against God cannot be atoned for until one has first asked forgiveness from those you have hurt.

It is customary to visit friends, family, associates, any person whom one may have wronged or spoken ill of in the past year. As an example, any stolen objects must be returned to their rightful owners; any person about whom you have spoken evil gossip should be asked for their forgiveness.

Jesus states, "So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift" (Mt. 5:23f).

And when someone comes to ask forgiveness, we have the words from Mt. 18:21f: "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to Peter, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."

That tiny word "as" in the Lord's Prayer makes all the difference.

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate*
*New Salisbury, IN*

## A POINT TO PONDER FROM *The Rule*

When speaking of the abbot, "This begins with a person who teaches by every action. This person is to be chosen because the members perceive that person as having characteristics that reflect God's ways. As humans, we have to see the ways of God through others. We can't really comprehend virtues like forgiveness or love or compassion in the abstract; we have to have experienced them through other human beings. The leader, then, takes the place of God by demonstrating what God feels like in this life." When I exercise authority, how do I try to represent God's ways?

*St. Benedict's Rule: An Inclusive Translation and Daily Commentary,*
by Judith Suters, p. 29.

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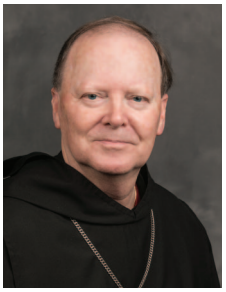
# And God said, "Have I got a deal for you!"



*Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB*

We pray for all kinds of reasons, don't we? We pray to worship God – to adore Him and give Him the praise that is his due. We pray to ask God for what we need. And, hopefully, we remember to pray to thank God for the blessings He has sent our way.

In our better moments, we pray to ask God to give others what they need. Yes, we pray to God for all kinds of reasons. But we do not pray to make a deal, to strike a bargain, with God.

For example, we do not pray that we *will* be good if God keeps us healthy. We do not pray that we *will* live a better life from now on *if* God gets us out of the mess we're in now. In short, we don't pray that we *will* do *that* then, if God does *this* now.

There are prayers of thanksgiving and adoration, and there are prayers of petition and intercession. But there are no prayers for bargains. The rule is that when we pray, we don't make deals; we don't bargain with God.

It's ironic, then, that the Our Father – the very prayer St. Thomas Aquinas called "the most perfect of prayers" – breaks that rule. Because when we pray the Our Father, we do, in fact, make a bargain with God.

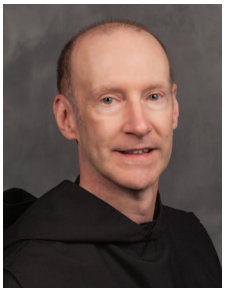
We ask God to forgive us *as* we forgive others. We ask that we be forgiven in the same way, in the same measure – perhaps even (and only) at the same time – that we forgive those who have wronged us.

Just think. When He teaches his disciples how to pray, Jesus instructs them to "make a deal," a deal God Himself offers us. *If* we forgive, we *will* be forgiven.

It's a bargain we can refuse, of course. But why would we want to?

*Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB*
*Saint Meinrad Archabbey*

# Forgiveness: A key to the Christian life



*Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB*

The *Rule of St. Benedict* does not include a chapter on forgiveness, but Benedict was aware of our daily need to forgive, and Chapter 4 of his *Rule* reflects this.

Chapter 4 concerns the tools for good works. Some of these are, "Do not nurse a grudge, or harbor resentments, or give a false greeting of peace. Help those in need. Care for the sick. Cheer the sorrowful. Serve others out of love for Christ." With these, we are being equipped, in the most basic and practical way possible, with the tools essential for our spiritual life.

The opening verse of Chapter 4 presents us with the essential law of the Gospel. We must ask, "Do we love God with our whole heart and our neighbor as ourselves?" If we are going to look on each of these successive verses as a help to discernment, then St. Benedict is facing us here with the

foundational questions on which the whole of the rest will be built.

These two precepts sum up the whole purpose of the Benedictine life, as of any Christian life, and St. Benedict is placing them here so that they are the keystones of the chapter. They present us with the yardstick to judge every thought, word and action: Is what we are thinking or doing contributing to the fulfilment of this commandment?

We are to see others as Christ, treat others as Christ. If we were looking for one single, simple phrase to sum up St. Benedict's entire way of life, we would find it in 4:21: "The love of Christ must come before all else." This Christ-love is the center of the whole *Rule* and the center of our lives.

If there is any one thing that is characteristic of St. Benedict, it is that he makes the love of Christ the focal point to which everything must lead. In 4:22-28, St. Benedict is looking at personal wholeness, showing us how we can so easily fail through harboring anger, carrying grudges and nursing resentments.

We are given brief comments from St. Benedict himself, perhaps the fruit of his own experience of community life at Monte Cassino. He knew that forgiveness was one of the keys to truly Christian living.

*Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB*
*Oblate Chaplain*

# *Rule* guides us in learning forgiveness

**From the *Rule of St. Benedict:*** *Your way of acting should be different from the world's way; the love of Christ must come before all else. You are not to act in anger or nurse a grudge. Rid your heart of all deceit. Never give a hollow greeting of peace or turn away when someone needs your love.* (4.20-26)

*Do not repay one bad turn with another…. Do not injure anyone, but bear injuries patiently.* (4.29-30)

*If you have a dispute with someone, make peace with him before the sun goes down.* (4.73)

*Janis Dopp*

If a monk is reproved in any way by his abbot or by one of his seniors, even for some very small matter, or if he gets the impression that one of his seniors is angry or disturbed with him, however slightly, he must, then and there without delay, cast himself on the ground at the other's feet to make satisfaction, and lie there until the disturbance is calmed by a blessing. (71.6-8)

Falling in love is easy. Staying in love is hard. It requires the ability to forgive and the willingness to be forgiven. In the end, it is the ability to forgive and be forgiven that carries us from the first flush of romance to the "for better or worse" of midlife and on into "till death do us part," as romance blooms into the bouquet of actually being in love.

It is fairly simple to forgive, being an ascent of the heart and mind to look past an instance of being hurt by someone you care for. It is the ability to say that, in the end, love prevails and is more important than the pain that has been experienced. You are still in control.

To allow someone to forgive you means that you must admit to having failed in loving. You are the one who has done the hurting. You have been in the wrong.

This isn't just about the big, hard stuff. We are given countless opportunities to practice forgiveness – on an almost daily basis. The *Rule of St. Benedict* is an invaluable guide to helping us learn how to do that.

One of the promises we make at our oblation ceremony is "stability of heart." We are promising to remain in the primary relationships and communities that God has gifted us with in our lives: our marriage and family, our church community, our network of friends. They all take the kind of work that the monks have to foster within the monastic community.

We just need to see them in that light. They aren't random selections that we have temporarily agreed to. They are the workshops where we learn how to be Benedictines in the world, bearing witness to the power of this discipline and the life-giving balm of forgiving and being able to accept the forgiveness of others.

Living and loving are never easy. They call us to be the best that we can be. They demand that we learn how to actually be all that we claim to be.

*Janis Dopp*
*Oblate Director*

# Notes for Novices:
## Forgiveness: Under lock and key

*Br. Michael Reyes, OSB*

Have you ever been hurt by someone that you cannot forgive? Did it take ages before you forgave the person? Are you still angry at this person to this day? The feeling of misery in a blanket of hate and anger becomes your disposition.

Yes, you are experiencing what most people feel when they get hurt by someone. It takes a while to let go and forgive the person unworthy of your love. This is why moving on is difficult when you have not forgiven. Forgiveness is the first step of healing.

Anger and hatred can place you in a state too challenging to escape. It is a prison with bars made of tears, hateful words and fury that forges you into evilness. The only solution is to get out of this corrupt prison. However, what if the key to unlocking the door is with you? Will you let yourself out, or do you want to remain inside? We all have the key to our harmful cells. It is our choice whether we want to be free or persist as prisoners of our creation. Forgiveness is the key to the lock of this hellhole.

When we forgive, no matter how insincere it is, we take the first step to heal ourselves. It does not mean that we need to let go of our pain and anger immediately. We just need to start the process of healing. The steps to healing are never painless. Everyone needs to heal because harm is inflicted on them, and these wounds hurt until they heal.

Applying the first medication to your wounds is always the most painful process of healing. Forgiving hurts because it is the initial treatment to healing. Once you have forgiven, the process of healing starts, and the pain of anger and hate disappears as time passes.

The monks of Saint Meinrad listen to a Scripture passage during Compline that says, "Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil" (Ephesians 4:26-27, NRSV). It is normal to be angry as humans, but do not let your anger linger. Forgive, and you are in the fast lane toward healing.

Forgiveness can also transform you into a better person. As oblates and monks, we strive to be more like our Lord through the Benedictine vow of *conversatio morum* – the "conversion of life." We should try to become more forgiving, merciful and kind to others.

For our "Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always accuse, nor will he keep his anger for ever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities" (Psalm 103:8-10, NRSV).

God wants us to be joyful and clear from all anger and hate. You have the key of forgiveness to unlock the prison door of misery and agony. Why would you stay in a festering dark confinement when the radiant and pleasant road is just steps away? Go ahead and unlock that door. Forgiveness will set you free to the path of healing! Do not be a captive of your own creation, but emancipate yourself to a positive and holier well-being.

*Br. Michael Reyes, OSB*
*Oblate Novice Mentor*

## Oblate December Retreat

***Join us on the Hill for the annual Oblate December Retreat!***

December 10-12, 2021
Saint Meinrad Archabbey

Fr. Lorenzo Penalosa, OSB, speaker

# Notes from Novices:
## Who is responsible for forgiveness?


*Mark Plaiss*

In the story of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:2-11), and in the Parable of the Lost Son (Luke 15:11-32), Jesus forgives the woman, and the father forgives the son, respectively. In both stories, an individual has sinned, and the Lord and the father forgive the individuals.

COVID-19 has presented the world a problem. Physical fighting has broken out on airplanes – while in flight, mind you – over wearing a mask. At the school where I teach, some parents are adamant that their children will not wear masks, while others insist masks must be worn. Lots of ugly words spill forth on that!

During the Triduum of 2020, the doors to our church were locked; even the codes to enter a door with a fob were changed (without notice), so that no one who normally had access to the church could enter the building.

COVID has forced us to live life in a manner that's not the norm. We know this to be the case, feel it in our bones. Anger, resentment and frustration ensue. So, we lash out.

Now, in the above-mentioned passages from Scripture, an individual sins and forgiveness is offered. But in this COVID mess, what is there to forgive? I'm angry that I have to wear a mask; who do I forgive for making me do that? The doors to my parish are locked; who do I forgive for that? No, all we can do is endure it.

And that's the rub. Since there is no forgiveness, since no one is deemed responsible, all that anger, resentment and frustration simply fester. One purpose of the sacrament of Reconciliation has the penitent being made whole again. No such vehicle is available for COVID.

The way out, it seems to me, is St. Paul's conclusion to Chapter 13 of his first letter to the Corinthians: faith, hope and love. Faith that "The Lord will not abandon his people nor forsake those who are his own" (Psalm 94:14); hope in Jesus who says, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live" (John 11:25); and God's love for us is so intense that He exclaims, "from the womb before the dawn I begot you" (Psalm 110:3).

Our mission as oblates of Saint Meinrad Archabbey is to manifest those Pauline attributes in the world: stability to a purpose in life, fidelity to that way of life, and obedience to the God who gives us that life and wants us to have it more abundantly (John 10:10).

Masks and locked doors will pass away, but "my words will not pass away" (Matthew 24:35).

*Mark Plaiss, oblate novice*
*Fox Lake, IL*

# Forgiveness comes from strength

Forgiveness is difficult and it sometimes seems impossible, whether the hurt stems from real or perceived injustice. "To err is human, to forgive divine" (Alexander Pope). Christ showed this trait while suffering on the cross. And it has been emulated by St. Stephen, Pope John Paul and Gladys Staines.

Graham Staines and his sons were burnt alive in India. Gladys Staines, his wife, forgave this unimaginable cruelty. Most of us never face such a level of horror, but we do face tough events that need us to forgive. Christ offered forgiveness from the cross without asking repentance from the perpetrators.

Difficulty forgiving, even if someone is sorry, and letting go of the pain, can seem too much to bear. Try to see the other's point of view; empathize.

Forgiveness is not forgetting, nor must it mean friendship. It says I am not going to further hurt. Carrying anger is like carrying a hot coal. It burns. Repentance from the perpetrator may be necessary for reconciliation, but it is unnecessary for forgiveness.

The sacrament of Reconciliation is a powerful sacrament, where the grace of the Lord flows. We experience God's embrace. It takes a courageous step to seek forgiveness. God's invitation to us is very challenging when He says to love our enemies.

Forgiveness comes from strength. While it is easier to read and talk

*Continued on Page 19*

# Dispossession Part 4:
## Monastic poverty and the virtue of patience

*Fr. Adrian Burke*

Earlier in this series on monastic poverty, I wrote that much of what we value most, our precious "possessions," are of a spiritual nature. Interior dispositions, attitudes and opinions that we harbor as "absolute truths" are often what we build our sense of self around; an ego-structure that, for better or worse, becomes the filter through which we perceive reality and the source of our motivational energies.

Hopefully, my reflections here in the *Benedictine Oblate Quarterly* on the topic of Benedictine poverty have encouraged you to prayerfully examine your interior landscape and courageously dispossess yourself of whatever you might inwardly cling to that inhibits your freedom in Christ. This is no small task, but as St. Benedict teaches, "what is not possible to us by nature, let us ask the Lord to supply by the help of grace" (RB Prol. 41).

It's not enough to "disown" our sinful dispositions and attitudes. We also must claim as our treasure what is truly life-giving. I want to address a specific interior disposition that builds up one's adherence to Christ in a very direct way, even as it gradually strips away defensive dispositions that resist the "dying of the old self" so necessary to true spiritual freedom.

Self-renouncing dispositions are what we call "the virtues": practical expressions of charity that are so Christ-like that they build up in us a new identity in Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). I call them Christian character traits.

As such, the virtues are expressive of one's adherence to God "in the Spirit" and thus constitute the "substance" of the spiritual life. The virtues are how belief in Jesus Christ becomes concrete as a lived reality. And because it is "the work of God" to believe in Christ (cf. John 6:29), we must collaborate with grace (the Spirit) to establish a life of true virtue.

St. Benedict places a particular virtue at the apex of the spiritual life, and it may surprise you which one it is. (Hint: it's not obedience!) The virtue he points to is one upon which a harmonious community life depends because, without it, true obedience is not possible, nor humility either. That virtue is patience.

Patience is so difficult! Indeed, for me, the most challenging thing I face each day is the labor of patience. The Prologue to the *Rule* serves as a kind of "purpose statement" for Benedictine life. Patience is so crucial to the Christian life that the monastic legislator completes his Prologue with this flourish: "… we shall *through patience* share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom. Amen!" (RB Prol. 50, italics added).

The virtues signify that we are being "guided by the Spirit" and that we "belong to Christ Jesus." St. Paul names certain virtues as "fruits of the Spirit" in his Letter to the Galatians:

> The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, *patience*, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another (Gal. 5:22-23 – NIV, italics added).

The hard part in the above quotation is the part that reads, "crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Self-denial is the flip side of virtue, and in my view, self-denial is what patience is. Patience is enduring the cost to self of pursuing what is better for someone else (cf. RB 72:7). Perhaps, too, it's why St. Benedict describes patience as how we share in the sufferings of Christ, and thus deserve to share in his kingdom.

The inmost self, where we are grounded in Christ, is the source from which the "strength" (Latin, *virtus*) to be Christ-like comes. Virtues are signs of the indwelling Holy Spirit and are akin to emotive energies that arouse us to action. Patience is a form of spiritual strength by which we channel our natural emotive energies, anger and frustration, for instance, and, as directed by the Spirit, put the needs and feelings of the other in the place of our own. Patience empowers the "dispossession" of our ego-centered needs and activates the "new self" in Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17).

So when we assist a brother or sister, perhaps because they are not strong, as Benedict instructs us to do in RB 35:3-4, we are responding to the need of the other as if it was our own need. In RB 72, on the good zeal of monks,

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# Meet A Monk: Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB

*Br. John Mark Falkenhain*

Beginning in his senior year of high school, Br. John Mark Falkenhain, OSB, could feel a stirring in his heart that pulled him toward communal religious life through his being steeped in the Marianists and their way of life.

After earning a bachelor's degree at Christian Brothers College in Memphis, TN, he tested the waters with a three-month discernment as a candidate at St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, MN. At 22, he left the program, discerning he wasn't ready to dive into monastic life. "I was too young. I didn't proceed with the formation," he remembered.

He entered graduate school to further his education and embark on a career path. From the outside, it looked like he was well on his way to enjoying every success. Br. John Mark had it all. Educational opportunities that included master's and doctoral degrees in clinical psychology, as well as a career with prestige and acclaim. He was moving steadily upward from retreat director to resident and staff psychologist to adjunct assistant professor.

Yet, there was a huge piece missing.

Even though he had interrupted his formation at St. John's Abbey, monastic life still attracted him. He began attending a retreat at Saint Meinrad Archabbey each year with some Marianist friends, starting in 1996.

By 2001, he had decided. In 2002, he closed the door on material success and entered the new life he had been searching for, becoming a member of the Archabbey monastic community. He has never looked back.

Br. John Mark's yearly visits to the Archabbey had done their job. They had given him a glimpse into community life. "It had a nice tradition in music and prayer and liturgy," he says. "These are important to me."

His desire for religious life had led him here, where he finally could identify the charism to which he was being called: the Benedictine monastic life. That is not to say that living this monastic life is easy; far from it. "To live in community is like living in a large family."

He explains how one deals with living in the community. "We get the challenge to love, and to love when it's difficult to love. Some people are easy to love, while others, one struggles to love. The whole goal is to learn to love perfectly when offended."

He points out the words of Jesus: "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). It's not about rules, but rather about loving your enemy, he says.

Being a monk in a community has its advantages. There is structure to the day. Time is designated for prayer, reading and work. "We need these to focus," he says. Regarding the oblates, they provide a witness to the monks of faithfulness to the duties and promises of the oblate vocation despite the demands of family, work, and life outside the walls of the Archabbey.

Acknowledging that these demands can make it more challenging to stick with our oblate disciplines, Br. John Mark has this advice: "It's important to remember the chapter in the *Rule* on good works, Chapter 4. After the long list of everything, here is the most striking thing: 'And finally, never lose hope in God's mercy.' Always we must rely on God's mercy and forgiveness."

Currently, Br. John Mark serves the Archabbey as choirmaster, using his background in voice and chant to bring the Word of God to life with the gift of singing, and in the Seminary and School of Theology as adjunct assistant professor of psychology. He is also a Fellow with the St. Luke Institute in Silver Spring, MD. In addition, he has written and researched extensively on the prevention of child sexual abuse and worked to educate clergy and religious.

Next year, Br. John Mark will celebrate 20 years of monastic profession as a consecrated religious brother. And that's just fine with him. It's all about learning to love as God loves.

"To love all the time, to act in charity, that is the whole reason to be here."

*Angie McDonald, oblate*
*Huntingburg, IN*

# Two kinds of forgiveness: Quick and slow

*Zac Karanovich*

When a monk commits a fault or a sin, St. Benedict implores him to "at once come before the abbot and community and ... admit his fault and make satisfaction" (RB 46.1-3). Of course, there are pastoral exceptions to this, but simply put, the monk should be honest with himself and his community (or their representatives, see RB 46.5) as they strive toward holiness by rooting out sin.

Chapter 46 offers evidence of the "quickness" of forgiveness as envisioned by Benedict. The monk at fault should hasten to seek forgiveness. And the community, without ignoring the need for reparation, should hasten to offer forgiveness.

Contrast this speed with the much slower process of excommunication. The defiant monk, having been warned privately of the consequences of disregarding the *Rule* or the orders of senior monks, is to be excommunicated (RB 23).

The chapters on excommunication show the "slowness" of forgiveness, not in its offering but in the persistence and patience with which its request is awaited. While protecting the well-being of the community, the abbot works with sedulous care to bring the wayward monk home.

In *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Thomas Merton illustrates what this looks like in the concrete. At the corner of Louisville's Fourth and Walnut, he suddenly became aware of the interconnectedness of all of humanity.[1] Merton explains that what connects us all is *le point vierge* – an innermost point within each of us from which God holds us in being and love with Godself and one another (pp. 155-56).

But technological progress, by which he means the way we have made our ability (we *can*) our responsibility (therefore we *should*), has rendered us anonymous automatons in a system of production and consumption (pp. 70-71).

We are now subject to the god of progress and require "plausible and useful lies" – often "the emotional use of slogans and political formulas" (p. 59) – to help us make sense of something that, at its root, is senseless and contrary to the will of God (p. 62).

The result: "[W]hat we desire is not 'the truth' so much as 'to be in the right'" (p. 72). In this falsehood, we are estranged from God, others and ourselves; and violence – in all its various forms – ensues from the overflowing of our inner conflict.

Merton's solution is a blend of the *Rule*'s quick and slow forgiveness. To break through this false self and acquire a truer version of the self, Merton encourages the practices of prayer and truth. In prayer, we try to approach that *point vierge* and be invited into it by God – the union sought in prayer. That requires a shedding of the false self – the automaton self who worships the god of progress and is at the mercy of propaganda.

Our prayer, then, must be accompanied by a critical self-examination resulting in the renunciation of our held untruths.[2] Some renunciation we can do alone if we are honest with ourselves, but for "all our unconscious attachments,"[3] we require the help of God and others who reveal these untruths to us. We become aware of our faults, either recognized by ourselves or revealed by others, and seek forgiveness. The community is called to quickly forgive.

In our current socio-political-religious climate, not everyone is ready to reckon with their faults. Defiant resistance to reconciliation persists. Here, two things are important in ministering to those who resist the call to reconciliation.

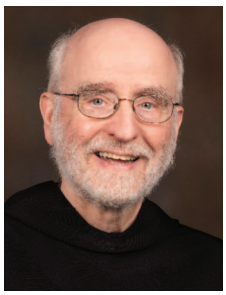
First, the Christian must lead by example. The monk does not become a spiritual elder by merely calling out or "cancelling" their brother or sister in error. Instead, the *senpectae*[4] are those who have and continue to compete in obedience and humility (RB 72). We must always continue in our own prayer to critically examine ourselves for lingering propaganda and biases.

Second, the Christian must lead with love. As Merton acknowledges, it will be impossible to reveal to another the fault they have "unless the other is convinced that his critic first sees and loves the good that is within him" (*CGB*, 65). This means that one "seeks the salvation and redemption of the opponent, not his castigation, humiliation, and defeat" (p. 81).

*Continued on Page 18*

1 *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Image, 2014) 153.
2 *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Book, 1972) 251, 255.
3 Persons who reach out to a monastic not living the correct monastic life.
4 *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (New York: Image, 2014) 153.

# The first step of forgiveness: Do it quickly



*Fr. Bede Cisco, OSB*

When I talk with someone about forgiveness, one of my first comments is that we should try to forgive another for an offense as quickly as we can. We don't need to tell them that we've forgiven them, but we do need to say it to God.

Forgiveness is an act of the will – I decide to forgive and I have forgiven. But that's not the end of the process. There are hurt feelings and stirred emotions that need attention. Our feelings and emotions, though, should not prevent us from deciding to forgive immediately if we can.

The reason we need to forgive promptly comes from the Gospels. In Mark's Gospel, after telling his disciples about the power of faith and the effectiveness of prayer, Jesus says, "When you stand to pray, forgive anyone against whom you have a grievance, so that your heavenly Father may in turn forgive you your transgressions" (11:25).

In the Sermon on the Mount, after teaching his listeners what we call the Lord's Prayer (see *RB* 13:12f), Jesus adds, "But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions" (Mt. 6:15). God's forgiveness is directly connected to our forgiveness of others. If we want to continue our relationship with the Lord, we need to forgive the offenses of others quickly.

Our feelings and emotions often complicate the process of forgiving. We need to pay attention to them. The hurt we experience from others is real and painful. Sometimes we think we can begin to get back at our offenders by refusing to forgive them.

We say to ourselves that we'll punish them. Then we ignore them or reduce our interactions to the required minimum. Our emotions are driving our actions and we risk not honoring the dignity of the other person. While trying to isolate the offenders, we end up imprisoning ourselves in a cage of unforgiveness that we have set up. And the unforgiven offenders continue to have power over us, exactly the opposite of what we were trying to accomplish.

Forgiveness is freeing. Forgiving is an activity in which we act the way God acts – God always wants to forgive us; all we have to do is ask. How wonderful that we can act in the same way toward others. By forgiving others when they offend us, we are continuing and extending the saving work of Christ.

The *Rule* tells us, "If you have a dispute with someone, make peace with him before the sun goes down" (4:73, *RB 1980* translation). Forgiving another quickly is important, and doing so directly is good. But in-person forgiving is not always timely or even possible. When the offender is not present or is deceased, we can't tell him or her that we forgive them.

And sometimes we may not feel ready or able to tell someone present to us that we forgive them. It may take some time to process our feelings and get to the place where we can and want to tell someone directly that we forgive them.

As we work through the effects of an offense, we may find we need a fuller healing process. A spiritual guide can help us sort out our feelings, our need for healing, and how to decide to speak with the offender. We will want to tell the offender in a simple and direct way that we forgive them.

Often, we overlook the need to forgive ourself. At Mass, we say, "Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy." And the Lord does have mercy on us, empowering us to have mercy on others, and on ourselves.

One obstacle to forgiving others can be our lack of mercy for ourselves. If God has forgiven us, why would we fail to forgive ourselves? Many of us can be too hard on ourselves and neglect to accept fully God's mercy and forgiveness. Our spiritual growth will progress greatly when we forgive ourselves.

Besides forgiving others and ourselves, forgetting is an important part of moving forward in our conversion and spiritual growth. Forgetting is what God does with our sins. One important place where God expresses this intention is Jeremiah 31:34: "Everyone, from least to greatest, shall know me – oracle of the Lord – for I will forgive their iniquity and no longer remember their sins."

Forgetting sins is what the priest does when he hears confessions – he forgets the sins of the penitents and does not refer to them again. That is the meaning of the seal of confession. The forgetting that God and the confessor do frees people from any continuing effect of their sins.

After we've worked through the feelings, sometimes we may be able to forget the offenses we forgive, and so imitate God's freeing way of dealing with sin. But forgetting offenses is not

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# Spiritual Direction: Doorways to Deeper Faith

*Beverly Weinhold*

In 1983 John Paul II visited Mehemet Ali Acca in Rebibia prison. Two and a half years before, this same man attempted to assassinate the Pope in St. Peter's Square. John Paul spent 20 minutes in the white-walled cell and, when he left, he gave the prisoner two gifts: a silver rosary and his forgiveness. Most of us haven't forgiven an assassin, but all of us know we need forgiveness and want to offer it to others.

Our world is so broken. We are sinners and saints. And all of us have been wounded. God heals the holes in our soul with forgiveness. In the Greek New Testament, forgiveness means to loose, release and set free. Every 50 years, the Hebrews foreshadowed forgiveness with the Year of Jubilee, where people's debts were forgiven, slaves were released, and property returned to its owners (Leviticus 25:1-13). The lavishness of forgiveness consummated on the cross when Christ died for our sin.

Charles Wesley, overcome with praise, wrote a poem about it:[1]

> He breaks the power of canceled sin,
> He sets the prisoner free;
> His blood can make the foulest clean,
> His blood avail'd for me.

When I was a young Christian, I wanted to forgive, but I didn't know how. So I picked up a little book by Lewis Smedes,[2] who suggests three movements to the art of forgiveness: Rediscover their humanity. Surrender the right to get even. Wish the person well.

**Rediscover an offender's humanity**

I think it's true when people hurt us, we unwittingly objectify them. We want to cut them down to size. For instance, if Bill is disloyal, I might call him a "cheater." If Mary misleads me, I will call her a "liar." Rather than using a proper noun, I make people out to be a verb. That movement objectifies the other and downsizes them into a "human doing, not a human being."

God's gaze is very different. God sees me through Jesus' righteousness: He who "had no sin, became sin that we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). You and I can't do that. But we can ask the Spirit to fill our hearts with the holy fruit of "love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness" (Gal. 5:22-23).

We can also regain perspective and remember not just the bad, but the good one does, even looking for the redemptive strands when evil was intended.

**Surrender the need to get even**

Forgiveness also invites us to surrender the right to revenge. Revenge can feel right when we think it "just": "He deserves his just desserts!" After all, people should pay for the wrong they've done, especially when one crosses a boundary or commits a crime. We need to be held accountable. There would be no holiness or orderliness without accountability. While God's mercy triumphs over judgment, it does not ignore justice. As one man said: "Forgiveness lies in the human heart, but the criminal must still spend time in Caesar's jail." So we might report a crime, call someone out or clear the air. But vengeance isn't ours. "Vengeance is mine, says the Lord … don't be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:19-21).

**Wish the person well**

Like Bunyan's Pilgrim, our path toward forgiveness gets steeper, not smoother. Alongside seeing another's humanity and letting go of revenge, we are called to "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you" (Luke 6:27-38). That's a tall order.

Joseph in Genesis is an example. He was 17 when he was dumped in a pit and left for dead – not by an enemy, but by family. When a famine struck, his brothers came to Egypt begging for bread. Pharaoh's right-hand man was the one parceling it out. He gave them three gifts: a caravan of food, well wishes and forgiveness forged in the furnace of suffering. He said: "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20).

Lewis Smedes summed it up this way: "When you release the wrongdoer from the wrong, you set a prisoner free. Only to find out the real prisoner was you."

*Beverly Weinhold, oblate novice*
*Louisville, KY*

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[1] *O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing,* first published in *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (1780).
[2] Smedes, L. B. (1997). *The Art of Forgiving: When You Need to Forgive But Don't Know How.* NY:Ballantine.

# Considering the Psalms:
## The joy of forgiveness

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.

For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.

You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.

I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.

Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.

Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

*—Psalm 32 (31), NRSV Bible with the Apocrypha, eBook Kindle Edition, by Harper Bibles*

*Kathleen Polansky*

There are two words I have never heard a certain relative utter: "I'm sorry." I remember the time I was building a coffee table in the garage and waiting for the stain to dry when she drove into the table, severely marring it. It became my fault for her not seeing it.

It is very difficult to be a forgiving person when someone hurts you and does not care enough to acknowledge the hurt, pain and alienation that result. I write this because in The Lord's Prayer, we are asking God to forgive us in the same manner as we forgive others, yet sometimes circumstances increase that challenge of forgiveness.

A member of our parish staff chose to humiliate someone publicly rather than handle a situation with professionalism and compassion. When privately confronted, the reaction was to ignore personal ownership of the pain and hurt caused. This prolonged the hurt and eventually caused the one who was humiliated to leave the parish. How does this invite the one harmed to forgive?

Psalm 32 blesses the one whose fault is removed, whose sin is forgiven. It also reminds us that keeping silent wastes away our living. It is in declaring our sin that we are freed. In that declaration is also the opportunity for forgiveness from those to whom we have brought pain and harm.

Silence, denial and dismissal of the harm that we cause not only leaves us in guilt and deceit, but leaves others in pain.

As a young child in grammar school, I heard the instruction that sin affects others. I heard this over and over. My first deeply felt understanding of that reality came when I was preparing to be an Apostolic Volunteer with the Sinsinawa Dominican sisters.

All the current volunteers were at the motherhouse on retreat, in preparation for spending a year working in various ministries with the sisters. At some point, money disappeared from several volunteers' rooms. We were in a place that never knew a need for door locks throughout its long history.

It deeply offended the sisters who lived there that their home, which they had opened to us, had been violated. Those of us who were retreatants were now under suspicion. The air of trust was shattered.

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# Scripture reminds us of the gift of forgiveness


*Cathey Byers*

Forgiveness is foundational to our Christian faith. All believers are familiar with the image of Christ on the cross, but even more transformational are his dying words: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Jesus' words show us that, while we are all sinners, there is hope for us – and forgiveness.

Words of forgiveness appear throughout Scripture: "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, … If your brother sin, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him" (Luke 17:3). "To him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (Acts 10:43).

"For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly father will also forgive you" (Matthew 6:14). "And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your father in heaven may forgive you your sins" (Mark 11:25).

"Love prospers when a fault is forgiven, but dwelling on it separates close friends" (Proverbs 17:9). "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:37).

"Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, 'Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?' Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times'" (Matthew 18:21-22).

Clearly, Jesus' intent was that we not only love one another, but also that we forgive one another.

For Roman Catholics, the sacrament of Reconciliation is an opportunity to experience forgiveness. In James, we read, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working" (James 5:16).

The sacrament of Reconciliation is also called penance. According to the *Catechism*, there is a virtue of penance. As the *Catechism* says, penance is a supernatural virtue by which we are moved to detest our sins from a motive made known by faith and with an accompanying purpose of offending God no more and of making satisfaction for our sins. Through this sacrament, and through its sanctifying grace when sin is forgiven, the darkness of the soul disappears and the light of God reappears.

For Benedictines, Chapter 71 of the *Rule* speaks to mutual obedience. As Benedict says, "Obedience is a blessing to be shown by all, not only to the prioress and abbot but also to one another, since we know that it is by this way of obedience that we go to God."

Joan Chittister, in her commentary on this chapter, argues that "*The Rule* wants relationships that have been ruptured to be repaired, not by long, legal defenses but by clear and quick gestures of sorrow and forgiveness. The question in the *Rule* is not who is right and who is wrong. The question in the *Rule* is who is offended and who is sorry, who is to apologize and who is to forgive. Quickly. Immediately. Now" (*The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century*, 297).

Imagine our relationships if we all followed this path!

In the final analysis, then, we must all choose to forgive and, as we are urged by Paul in his letter to the Colossians, "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive."

*Cathey Byers, oblate*
*Bradenton, FL*

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St. Benedict directs us to "support *with the greatest patience* one another's weaknesses of body or behavior, competing in obedience to one another" (italics added).

So, even when one feels upset or frustrated by inconsiderate behavior or the superficial "neediness" of a brother or sister, acknowledging one's own ego-centered feelings but choosing to behave in a kind and generous way, well, that is what patience looks like! If we can be patient with the inconsiderate brother or sister, think how much more patient we'll be in bearing the burdens of those who really need our help.

By the practice of patience, our obedience to the demands of charity grows more habitual over time (cf. RB 7:68); we "show the pure love of brothers and sisters, and to God, loving fear" (RB 72:8). It is the way by which "we go to God" (RB 71:2) and radiate the divinizing light of the Spirit … hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love!

*Fr. Adrian Burke, OSB, monk*
*Saint Meinrad Archabbey*

# Reflections on Ravens: How I got hit by humility

*Edward Castronova*

I was angry at my parents. For 30 years, I seethed over what they had done to me and my brother and sister. It was bad, and I had a lot of problems because of it. Still do. For a long time, I thought I had been hugely and uniquely mistreated. I became a black sheep, an angry rebel type.

I became Catholic. Even that was rebellion. Though my parents were raised Methodist, we had no religion in our house, unless it was the post-1968 religion of "If it feels good, go ahead." I knew the consequences of that attitude, up close and personal. I did not want indulgence to become the centerpiece of my own life. I liked the way Catholicism pushes back on it. Catholicism teaches self-control and concern for others.

It also teaches forgiveness. I didn't even understand that very well; I wasn't conscious of it. It was one of those things that I thought I understood, but didn't, until a retreat by Br. Zachary Wilberding, OSB. During the retreat, I asked myself: Is there anyone I can't forgive? And I realized the answer was no. And that surprised me.

I suddenly became aware that I can forgive everyone. It was a unexpected turn of my heart; I don't know why or how I suddenly got that grace.

But here's what the message was: "You can forgive because, face it, you're a mess yourself, and always have been. Not only that. Your pains and sorrows are not huge or unique, you big knucklehead. Do you have any idea how many tears I deal with every day because of parents? And if you think your suffering is huge, I can tell you some stories. So shut up and forgive. Also, while I have your attention – no, you don't need another Diet Coke from the kitchen."

Please understand that the message comes across in a joking way. Like a good friend.

And so I had a sudden movement of humility, where I saw myself with more honesty and thought. Given all the crap I've done to other people, I have no grounds for holding grudges against anybody. If I forgave the whole world, I'd still be underwater.

How about you? Is there anyone you can't forgive? Maybe you could ask your good friend about it.

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

# The cross: A symbol of forgiveness

*Editor's note: This article by oblate Ron Lewis was written before his death earlier this year.*

*Ron Lewis*

Have you ever wondered why God didn't decide to save us without having his only Son die the gruesome death of crucifixion? Surely, the Lord could do anything, right? Yes, He can do anything, but He cannot violate his own character.

God is holy. We know that all people have disobeyed his law, and fellowship with Him has been broken. Romans 3:23 tells us, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." From the beginning of time, He has required a penalty for disobedience to his commands.

However, because of our heavenly Father's great love for us, He allowed another life to be offered for our sin debt. In Old Testament times, people would sacrifice animals to atone for wrongdoing. However, this gracious provision was just a temporary solution. Jesus' death was the final and permanent sacrifice for sin. Our loving Savior took that penalty upon Himself, dying in our place; the Son of God willingly became our sin and took the Father's wrath upon Himself.

And then Jesus did something that we could not. Three days after dying, He rose from the grave. Jesus conquered death! We now have direct access to the heavenly Father through Christ's death on the cross. Once we accept his gift of full forgiveness, our entire sin debt is canceled.

There is nothing you can do to make yourself right with God. But you can be forgiven of all your sin and receive eternal life by trusting in Christ's death on your behalf.

*Ron Lewis, oblate*
*Bloomington, IN*

# Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord

## Forgiveness: A lesson learned the hard way

*John Brooks*

Every year I live has brought lessons on living a good life. They come from all around. Some are funny, some are painful, and some we must learn repeatedly. I was looking through an old family album and I came across a picture of my dad. I remembered a lesson on forgiveness that has been very painful, has elicited many tears and weighed heavily on my heart.

My father was strong-willed, determined and a fighter till the end. He was diagnosed with colon cancer, underwent surgery and chemotherapy. At his five-year check, they discovered the cancer had returned. This time surgery was not an option and radiation treatment was attempted. Even with his doctor's most gallant efforts and my father's strong will, it was unsuccessful.

Dad was admitted into the hospital, and the children were called to his bedside. Five of us arrived and our oldest brother was due in from California the next day. Dad was tired, but we were remembering stories of times past, the happy funny times.

Calling into work to check on a job that was scheduled for the next day left me conflicted. So after talking to the doctors and my family, I was told if I had to work, then work and come up later. My wife told me the decision was mine. I decided I would work and come up later.

It was a time before cellphones. We used radios, pagers and pay phones. After a long day, I returned to the remnants of a Christmas party. I was reporting on the job, when the owner's wife asked if she could get me a plate of food. She came back, and we talked as I ate. There was a knock on the door. It was my wife. I was surprised and asked if she wanted me to get her a plate, as the food was delicious.

She said we needed to talk and then she would drive me home. The owners excused themselves and my wife told me my father had died earlier in the day. I asked if I was the only one not at his bedside; she answered yes. She told me they were unable to reach me.

I was sad and angry. As we were leaving, I stopped, looked and said, "You knew! You made me stay and eat and you said nothing." I didn't hear what they said, I just walked out.

Sitting in the car, my wife turned to me and said "You asked everyone, gathered all the information available and *you* decided. *You* decided. You have a right to be sad and angry, but not rude, not hateful, and definitely not mean to those around you who care. Apologize and ask for forgiveness."

At that moment, apologizing, asking and offering forgiveness did not alleviate the pain, but over time I have seen the wisdom that has allowed me to grow.

*John Brooks, oblate*
*Columbus, IN*


## In Honor of our Deceased Oblates

The Saint Meinrad Oblate Office is planning a way to honor our deceased oblates here at Saint Meinrad. Just as the memory of the deceased monks of the monastery continues to influence the lives of the monastic community, the oblates will always hold a place of honor on this Holy Hill.

Br. Martin Erspamer, OSB, is designing a shrine for the sanctuary of the Saint Meinrad Guest House Chapel, which will house a book listing the names of all deceased oblates of Saint Meinrad. Each year, in a special ritual, we will add to the book the names of oblates who have died in the past year.

We invite you to participate in making this tribute of love and respect a reality. To raise funds for the shrine, we are selling a limited edition set of Christmas cards. Each set of 12 quality cards features three different angels from the artwork collection of Br. Martin. Only 250 sets will be printed. Each set will cost $25, plus $8 for shipping and handling.

Please visit **www.tinyurl.com/oblatecards** or call the Oblate Office at (812) 357-6817 to purchase your set and be part of this important project for our oblate community. Additional donations for this project are also welcome.

# Benedict's *Rule*
## founded on the work of many masters

*Editor's note: This article by oblate Thomas Rillo was written before his death earlier this year.*

When we first become oblate novices, we undergo a traditional initiation that follows a prescribed format. We are given a great deal of orientation material that will assist us on our Benedictine spiritual journey to grow closer to God. One item given to us is a little red book simply titled as *The Rule of St. Benedict*.

As the monk conducting the procedure hands us the *Rule*, he recites from the Prologue of the *Rule* these words: "Listen carefully, to the Master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart." Most oblates will hear these words and assume they are of St. Benedict. This is not the case. The master referred to in the Prologue is from a rule called *Regula Magistri* or *Rule of the Master*, written approximately three decades before the time of St. Benedict.

From *The Concise Dictionary of the Christian Church* by E.A. Livingston, the following definition is offered: *Regula Magistri*, an anonymous monastic Rule written by the Master in Italy, South East of Rome c. 520-25. In part it is verbally identical with the *Rule of St. Benedict* and the relationship between the two rules has been the subject of controversy but nearly all scholars give priority to the *Regula Magistri*.

Written and practiced 300 years before St. Benedict, it was by the sixth century an anonymous collection of monastic precepts. Although reference is made to the Master who wrote this earlier rule, the sheer bulk of it indicates that it was a collection from more than one individual.

In fact, the *Rule of the Master* is over three times the size of *The Rule of St. Benedict*. It is a heterogeneous collection in two parts. The first part deals with spiritual precepts and the second part concerns the pragmatic legislation that governs monastic life. The entire *Regula Magistri* constitutes a *Regula Monachorum* or *Rule for Monks*.

**Springboard for *The Rule***

Three hundred years before Benedict, there was a movement by men and women who denied the temptations and evils of cities and escaped to the Egyptian deserts for solitude and isolation from urban life. The harshness of this environment and its vastness provided solitude and separation from city life.

This was the beginning of monasticism, and one individual, St. Anthony the Great, rose from being a hermit monk to become abbot of one of the earliest monasteries. As more hermit monks came together to live in a central cloistered edifice, the need for rules legislating prayer and work for monks arose. From the very beginning, each abbot had the right to make or modify rules and to legislate them as needed. This monastery autonomy prevails to this day.

The first to create a rule for monks was St. Anthony the Great of Egypt. He clearly saw the need to legislate clear and finite rules for the hermit monks who eventually came together in a cenobite community. Although St. Anthony is considered the institutor of the cenobitic life, St. Pachomius, born in Egypt about 292 BCE, was the first to put a rule into writing.

St. Augustine also wrote a rule for his monks. When we reflect on St. Augustine's great contributions, it is not difficult to comprehend why his writings have influenced the development of Western monasticism. His *Letter 211* was read and reread by St. Benedict, who borrowed several significant texts from it for insertion into his *Rule*.

*Letter 211* became the *Rule of St. Augustine*, and it made up a part of the collection known as the *Rules of the Fathers*. Many of the founders of European monasteries adopted the *Rules of the Fathers*.

St. Basil traveled to Egypt to study the various monasteries and glean more knowledge about monastic life. He, too, put a rule for monks into writing. Many followers adopted *St. Basil's Rule*; they are known as Basilians even to this day. They are largely associated with the Eastern Orthodox Church, both in the Greek and Catholic traditions.

St. John Cassian (ca. 360-433 CE) is celebrated as a Christian theologian in both the Western and Eastern churches for his mystical writings. He is known as both a Scythian monk and as one of the Desert Fathers. He journeyed to Palestine and entered a hermitage near Bethlehem. After a while, he journeyed to Egypt and visited several Christian monastic communities. He later went to Constantinople, where he became a disciple and friend of John Chrysostom, the patriarch of Constantinople.

When John Chrysostom got into theological trouble, John Cassian was sent to plead the other John's case before Pope Innocent in Rome. It was probably in Rome that he received an invitation to found an Egyptian-type monastery in Southern Gaul, near Marseille, France. His foundation, called the Abbey of St. Victor, was a complex of separate monasteries for men and women and served as a model for later monastic development.

There is no doubt that St. Benedict had access to the works of John Cassian and the previous works by St. Anthony, St. Pachomius and St. Basil, and they undoubtedly influenced him. He incorporated many of the same precepts into his monastic rule. St. Benedict even recommended to his monks that they read Cassian's works.

St. Benedict's *Rule* is still used by Benedictine, Cistercian and Trappist monks to this day. The writings of John Cassian continue to guide the spiritual lives of thousands of men and women in the Western Church. As oblates, we are influenced by the thoughts of John Cassian, although we may not be aware of it.

**The New Versus the Old**

As we examine the relationship between the *Regula Magistri* and the *Rule of St. Benedict*, we must bear in mind the timeframe in which St. Benedict lived. Building on what was successfully practiced was not uncommon. Monks laboriously copied ancient manuscripts. There is no doubt that St. Benedict had access to the works of John Cassian, as well as previous works by St. Anthony, St. Pachomius, St. Basil and St. Augustine. He wrote the *Rule* while he was abbot of Monte Cassino.

References to previous writings about rules were accessible to Benedict. In fact, knowledge builds upon knowledge. This is how advancements in knowledge are perpetuated. Benedict wrote from his research and included that which was applicable to his community. Only the first seven chapters can be attributed to previous precepts. The rest of the 73 chapters of the *Rule of St. Benedict* were tailored for the monks of Monte Cassino.

He saw in the first seven chapters of his *Rule* those essential ingredients for living the spiritual life that were also in the *Rule of the Master*. Such ingredients as humility, obedience, silence and stability were incorporated into his *Rule*. Benedict built on what others before him had learned about the administration of a monastic community.

Every activity, whether individual or institutional, is built on a foundation. An extreme austerity characterized the earliest forms of Christian monasticism. In Egypt, the followers of St. Anthony were definitely eremitical, while those who followed the *Rule of St. Pachomius* closely approximate the cenobitical ideal but did not have the ingredient of stability. This is something that Benedict fervently insisted upon in his *Rule*.

When Benedict came to write his *Rule* for the monasteries he founded, he included in it the result of his own mature experience and observations. He gave his system stability, cohesiveness and organization. Scholars and historians are unanimous in crediting Benedict with writing a rule that has had great adoption throughout the world.

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What had been a time of learning and opening in trust was slammed shut. Everyone felt under scrutiny. I realized in a very real way the teaching that, until now, had been book learning. Sin affects others. I also came to realize the value of the Catholic Church's sacrament of Reconciliation.

As I tried to consider the number of persons harmed by this act, and the number of people who now have heard about it outside the convent, and the reputation that our Apostolic Volunteer group would always carry as a result of this sin, it became clear to me that an apology would never be completely possible with all those who had been affected.

Yes, those whose money had been stolen needed to be reconciled with, but beyond that, the sin and the alienation that resulted could never be fully expiated solely by the one who stole the money.

It was then that the gift of the sacrament of Reconciliation became truly a blessing to me. The priest not only stands in the place of Christ to the sinner, but also as a representative of the community that has been harmed. We have the opportunity to admit and acknowledge the harm we have done.

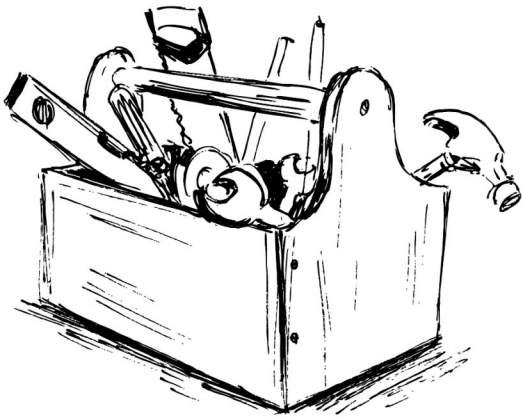
Our sins, like ripples on a pond, continue to widen and bump into everything in their path. Yes, we must make amends with those directly harmed. We give them the healing of our words of sorrow, and they may offer the grace to extend forgiveness. But it is also necessary to own the larger effect those actions, words, inaction, attitudes, etc. have had on society.

"Blessed is the one whose fault is removed, whose sin is forgiven… Do not be like a horse or mule, without understanding; with bit and bridle their temper is curbed."

*Kathleen Polansky, oblate*
*New Salisbury, IN*

# The Oblate Toolbox

## Feeling entitled? Lord's Prayer can help



*"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*

"You owe me!"

How many times have we heard it? Or how many times have we said it?

A recent Mass reading from the Book of Numbers recounts the Israelites' dissatisfaction with how God had been caring for them in the wilderness. They seemed to have forgotten the miracles they had experienced through the Exodus – the 10 plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the defeat of the Egyptians, the Ten Commandments, the establishment of Israel as a nation consecrated to God, and the manna.

It had all become so boring, so monotonous, so underwhelming.

As for Moses, he had his own litany of complaints for the Lord.

Haven't we all been there ourselves, just a little bit? Life doesn't go as we had planned. The miracles God performed for us last week are over. Now we're just wandering around aimlessly. So, we state our demands and lodge our complaints.

We might identify with Moses as well. We do our best to follow God's direction. We try to lead our families. But are they grateful? Do they say thanks? Hardly. So, we ignore the gifts we've been given and the grace we've received.

Entitlement. It was a problem in Moses' time, and it's still a problem in our time.

St. Benedict has a solution to this deplorable state. This tool is so readily available that it's easy to overlook. Chapter 13 of the *Rule* stipulates the inclusion of the Lord's Prayer at Lauds and Vespers "because thorns of contention are likely to spring up. Thus warned by the pledge they make to one another in the very words of this prayer: Forgive us as we forgive (Matt. 6:12), they may cleanse themselves of this kind of vice" (12b-13).

Are we feeling entitled today, like people owe us something? Maybe they really do. Maybe they hurt us in ways we just can't get over. How do we get through that?

Forgive us our debts – what we owe God – as we forgive our debtors – what others owe us. We can't have one without the other.

*Angie McDonald, oblate*
*Huntingburg, IN*

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This is the work of slow forgiveness. We must witness to the truth by our lives and recognize it where it exists in the other, while also being open to the same witness by and revelation from the other about our own faults.

To reconcile our socio-political-religious divides depends on our working together to "dissipate[e] the more absurd fictions [*held by both of us*] which make unity impossible" (p. 91). And Benedict, with remarkable foresight, offers us an important framework for this task: forgiveness, quick and slow.

*Zac Karanovich, oblate*
*Chestnut Hill, MA*

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always possible, or wise. We can forgive but cannot forget violence that causes us or others harm or in other ways risks future injury. Our forgiving, though, should free us and those who sin against us to live in peace and joy.

Forgiving others offers us the opportunity to live out being made in the image of God. Forgiving is a divine activity, and God always provides the grace for us to do it. The quicker we forgive the offenses of others and our own faults, the freer we will be.

*Fr. Prior Bede Cisco, OSB*
*Saint Meinrad Archabbey*

# Oblate News

## INVESTITURES

Plans are tentative for November 20, 2021.

## DEATHS

**Bertha Hoehn** of New Salisbury, IN, died on May 3, 2021.

**Mary Elizabeth "Libby" Gallagher** of Shelbyville, IN, died on April 12, 2020.

**John B. Rasche** of Richmond, KY, died on May 17, 2021.

**Chris Buchanan** of Morganfield, KY, died on May 18, 2021.

**Mary G. Miller** of Bartlett, TN, died on August 31, 2019.

**Ronald Lewis** of Bloomington, IN, died on May 27, 2021.

**Dr. Mary Sue Reuther** of Hamilton, OH, died on May 28, 2019.

**Regina Rodenburg** of Farmingdale, NY, died on February 23, 2021.

**Rev. Msgr. Nicholas Schneider** of St. Louis, MO, died on May 5, 2020.

**John R. Pelletier** of Mt. Pleasant, SC, died on August 3, 2021. ◆

## VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office were Fr. Mateo Zamora, OSB, Br. Michael Reyes, OSB, Nov. Matthew Morris, OSB, and Darren Sroufe, PhD. ◆



## ARTICLES WANTED

*Benedictine Oblate Quarterly* invites oblates and oblate novices 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 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 quarterly. A maximum of 500 words is suggested for all submitted articles. If choosing to add sources, please use endnotes and not footnotes.

Please send all submissions to Kathleen Polansky at kpolanskyoblate@yahoo.com.

**Upcoming themes and dates:**

Winter 2022 – Perfection (Final date of submission November 1)
Spring 2022 – (Final date of submission February 1)
Summer 2022 – (Final date of submission May 1) ◆

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about forgiveness, practicing it in real life can be extremely hard. The cross and suffering will be with us throughout our lives. I pray for God's grace to help all of us in this journey of forgiving and experiencing forgiveness.

*Deepak Frank, oblate*
*Columbus, IN*



## In memory of oblate Ron Lewis

Oblate Ron Lewis died on May 27, 2021, at age 81. Ron made many contributions to the *Benedictine Oblate Quarterly*. He regularly submitted articles to the "Reflections From the Wilderness" column.

He also was a frequent contributor to the Archdiocese of Indianapolis' Catholic newspaper, *The Criterion*, where he wrote both prose and poetry from the experience of his own "wilderness" of incarceration.

His insights were drawn from his frequent devotional prayers, rosary, reading and knowledge of the Scriptures as well as fidelity to the Eucharist, when it was available, and fidelity to the Liturgy of the Hours as an oblate. In his later years, he developed multiple physical and emotional challenges. Please keep Ron and his family in prayer.

Saint Meinrad Archabbey
Benedictine Oblate QUARTERLY

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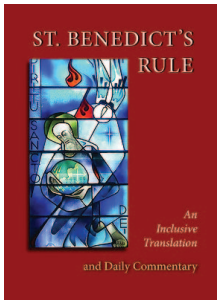
# Reading Room

*St. Benedict's Rule: An Inclusive Translation and Daily Commentary* by Sister Judith Suters, OSB; Liturgical Press, 2021.




At last, a book is published that Benedictines can use to delve deeper into understanding the *Rule* through the inclusive translations of Sister Judith Sutera. A member of the Benedictine monastery of Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, KS, she is one of the first women to receive a master's degree in monastic theology.

One of the most important features of the book is how Sr. Judith has made it gender neutral. Previously, the *Rule* (and most translations) was written for monks, who were all male.

It is the perfect book for oblates. It includes commentaries that will convey a greater depth of understanding and application for each of the rules. She provides concise, rich illumination and thoughtful questions for each rule to enable the reader to better grasp the mind of St. Benedict and the life he lived and called his monks to live. There is no doubt that this book, along with the *Rule*, should become a standard on the bookshelf of any oblate.

The author has for years studied and taught about St. Benedict. This innovative translation will be cherished by oblates and other Christians alike. It is perfect for study groups as well as retreats.

Equally important is the gender-neutral introduction that no one has successfully attempted before Sr. Judith's translation. Once again in reiteration, the reader will dive into the book and be convinced not only of its value, but its important place in Christian literature.

*Tom Rillo, oblate*
*Bloomington, IN*