



## Rule, Bible can guide us to self-awareness

News stories that are repeated day after day, year after year, have the effect of normalizing all kinds of behavior. Repetition can numb our ability to respond with compassion or anger. Repetition can bring about a change in our attitude. Hearing the same thing over and over affects a shift in what we perceive as normal. Once this has occurred, we are transformed. Eventually, society follows.

Sometimes change is positive, moving us toward living with greater care, understanding and compassion. Our lives become more loving; showing grace and letting go of rigid attitudes, motives, and beliefs; working to unite people for a common good.

But repetition also can generate an embrace of immorality, misinformation and divisiveness, leading to a normalcy that encourages captious behavior toward what we do not understand or accept.

As Christians and oblates, we look to two books when considering how these adjustments are influencing us. We have the *Rule of St. Benedict* and the Bible. Both sources offer us a mirror by which we can reflect upon our lives. They provide us with a guide to deeper self-awareness of our attitudes, behaviors, assumptions and intentions.

But beware. As we use these mirrors toward self-awareness, realize that our interpretations and understandings are not to become presumptions for control over and judgment of others, nor are we always accurate. It takes work to comprehend the depth and scope of our sacred writings.

This issue will explore self-awareness.

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# A POINT TO PONDER FROM *The Rule*

After this question, let us listen well to the reply of God who shows us the way to this tent, saying: “The ones who walk without blemish and do justice; who speak truth in their hearts; who have not used their tongues for deceit nor wronged anyone nor listened to slander against a neighbor”  
(Ps 14[15]:2-3).

(Prologue 24-27)

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## From Paul to Benedict to William



Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB

Self-awareness? Watch out. This could be a trick! After all, isn't being overly conscious of oneself, paying too much attention to oneself, offending against the virtue of humility?

How “aware of ourselves” should we be? How should a monk – an oblate, a Christian – approach the idea of self-awareness? I consider two matters.

First, it's a matter of remembering *who* I am and *whose* I am. *Who* I am is a simple question of identity. Me? I am a monk, a priest, and an abbot named Kurt. *Whose* I am is also a question of identity. *Whose* am I? I am God's. I belong to Him. *He owns me.*

I believe that's a large part of what St. Paul means when he writes in the 14th chapter of his Letter to the Romans, “None of us lives for oneself, and no one dies for oneself. For if we live, we live for the Lord, and if we die, we die for the Lord; so then, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's” (vs. 7-8).

Having quoted St. Paul, let me move on to our Holy Father Benedict. In verse 5 of the Prologue in his *Rule*, he writes, “In his goodness, he has already counted us as his children, and therefore we should never grieve him by our evil actions.”

In a second passage from the *Rule*, in Chapter 4, the “Tools of Good Works,” we read, “Day by day remind yourself that you are going to die. Hour by hour, keep careful watch over all you do, aware that God's gaze is upon you, wherever you may be” (vs. 47-49).

Taken together, these three passages remind us we should be aware of what we do because of who we are. God is always watching us. But, to people of faith, that's not a threat – it's a reassurance and a comfort. Our heavenly Father does not abandon us ... to ourselves!

Be aware! Be alert! Remind yourself who you are – and to whom you belong.

I've quoted St. Benedict and St. Paul. Let me offer a final quote, which we can find in Act I, Scene 3, of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Paraphrased, it reads, “First to thine own self be true, and then thou canst not be false to any other person.”

Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB  
Saint Meinrad Archabbey



Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, OSB, signs the vow chart of Cynthia Stille during the March 11 oblate rites.

# Self-awareness: Look closely at shortcomings



Janis Dopp

When we think of self-awareness, we most likely recall those qualities that make us strong, productive human beings. We know what we are good at,

where we can contribute our skill sets, and whom we know and love. We might think of work that has to be completed or a project that we want to delve into. And, of course, we know God loves us.

How often do I have the insight to look myself squarely in the eyes and admit my weaknesses? There are the faults where I have sinned, where I have been less than kind, where I haven't carried my fair share of the load. There are the times I have joined in a conversation that harmed another. There are the negligences when it was easier to ignore another's needs than to actually do something about it.

Interiority challenges me to put into practice what I have said "yes" to on

the day of my oblation. I can know the *Rule of St. Benedict* by heart, but until I begin to practice it, something major is missing from my spiritual well-being.

Has "obedience to the will of God" helped me to discern what my days should look like? Have I "remained faithful to the spirit of the monastic life" where the needs of the community come before my own? Have I practiced "stability of heart" when the going got tough?

And how do we arrive at this state of interiority? It is only through a relationship with God, who has called us into being and longs to converse with us about our very selves because we are created in his image.

This is where the practice of *lectio divina* helps us to take Scripture and the *Rule* to new depths of awareness, helping us find the way to live what we have been taught. Let us be honest about ourselves, recognize how we are to get closer to God and open the door to his desire to be close to us.

"Seeking laborers in the multitude of people, God calls out again: 'Who is

the one who desires life and longs to see good days?' If you hear this and answer, 'I am the one,' God then directs these words to you: If you will have true and everlasting life, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from deceit; turn away from evil and do good; seek after peace and pursue it. When you have done these things, my eyes will be upon you and my ears will open to your prayers, and even before you call upon me, I will say 'Here I am'" (*Prologue 14-18*).

St. Benedict gives us a great model regarding self-awareness and its rewards. If I have the courage to admit how much work I need to do each day, I also will be constantly encouraged that the *Rule of St. Benedict* is part of my life to help me overcome my shortcomings, make me more aware of the needs of others, and learn to love silence and self-reflection. It also will help me to live in freedom to hand myself over to God's invitation with humility and trust, saying in response, "Here I am."

Janis Dopp  
Oblate Director

# Self-awareness is linked to virtue of prudence



Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB

An important part of being a Christian is to be sensitive to the effect we have on others. How do my actions and words, for good or for ill, play in the lives of

those around me?

This is one aspect of being self-aware.

To be self-aware is to see ourselves clearly enough to realize some of the impact we have on others. Self-awareness is related to the virtue of prudence. Prudence is the acknowledgment that we don't know everything. It is recognition that since

human judgment is rooted in limited perception, then if we must use it at all, we should use it with care.

To be prudent is to take the trouble to think out what we are doing or saying and what is likely to come of it. What will result from our words and actions? Times can arise in which we must act quickly and on instinct. More often, we don't have to. Most of

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the time, we have ample opportunity to observe, reflect, and form an opinion before a decision must be made.

How many times has our premature judgment of another's character been proven shamefully wrong? How many times have we regretted a quick, unthinking choice of words, or a

hasty, negative thought about a person?

When we are self-aware, we look inward, think about our conversations and behavior, and consider how it aligns with our moral standards and values. One way to test the accuracy of our self-knowledge is to do a reality check.

This could be accomplished by asking others for some candid feedback concerning how they perceive us. Another's comments about us may not be easy to hear, but they can be one way that we become more self-aware and grow in our personal development.

*Fr. Joseph Cox, OSB  
Oblate Chaplain*

## Notes for Novices: Self-awareness can counteract our self-delusion



*Br. Gregory Morris*

*Why are you sleeping?* (Luke 22:46)

In the first step of humility, St. Benedict urges his disciples always to keep the fear of God before their eyes and never

forget it. Many monastic commentators link this step of humility to modern idioms, such as mindfulness and self-awareness.

In our first steps of self-awareness, we become conscious of a simple truth: we are made from the earth, bearing the image and likeness of God. Yet hatred and indifference seem highly prized virtues in our contemporary culture, instead of this most profound truth about ourselves.

These "virtues" are built upon a continual cycle of systematic political violence, homegrown terrorism, and endless rhetoric against racialized and marginalized peoples. For many, promoting conspiracy theories, xenophobia, racism, and transphobia is a scheme to garner influence and power

in a world without meaning or consequences.

It is truly an evil worldview antithetical to the precepts of Christ. It is no wonder many harbor misgivings about such notions as self-awareness and mindfulness in a world driven by power, money, fame and glory.

Self-awareness, endowed with grace and mercy, counteracts an endless, repetitive decline driven by our self-delusion. No one is immune to this dynamic of our fallen nature. My sinfulness is the same sinfulness carried and embodied by fellow human beings who chose evil over good, who chose the way of death instead of life. In short, self-awareness must ultimately be an ongoing conversion from pride to humility, opening our wounds to the rays of Divine Love.

Self-awareness is not a safe word. Nor, frankly, is God's salvific act in Christ Jesus, the Word made flesh, crucified and risen. To embrace the steps of self-awareness, that ladder of humility so emblematic within the holy *Rule*, is to become a friend of the Bridegroom Himself.

For "it is love that impels them to pursue everlasting life; therefore, they are eager to take the narrow road" (*RB 5:10*). To quote the famous Catholic philosopher-theologian Bernard Lonergan, "we are called to be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, responsible, and loving."

*Br. Gregory Morris, OSB  
Oblate Novice Mentor*



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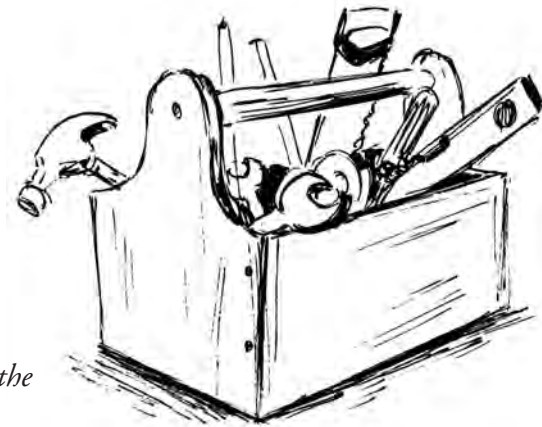




# The Oblate Toolbox

## Self-examination is first step toward holiness

*"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

St. Benedict's fifth step of humility in Chapter 7 of the *Rule* handles self-awareness in a unique way: it obliterates today's notion that one's shortcomings are

due to outside forces, such as bad parents, bad schooling or bad society.

Although they may have contributed to our problems, these reasons are nowhere to be found in the *Rule*. Instead, St. Benedict urges us to do the following: Humbly reveal to the abbot (for the oblate, that means the confessor) "all the evil thoughts coming into his heart and the evil deeds committed in secret" (*Rule of St. Benedict*, Saint Meinrad Translation).

Ouch. Evil thoughts? Evil deeds committed in secret?

It hurts to admit I have failed, that I hoard evil thoughts about others deep in my heart where only God can see. Yet, St. Benedict offers encouragement to us alongside his stiff exhortation:

Make known your way to the Lord and hope in him (*Psalms 37:5*).

Confess to the Lord, for he is good, for his mercy is forever (*Psalms 106:1, 118:1*).

I have made known to you my sin, and my unjust deeds I have not hidden. Against myself, I shall confess my unjust deeds to the Lord, and you have forgiven the ungodliness of my heart. (*Psalms 32:5*).

God reassures us through these Scriptures that we may certainly hope in Him, that He is good, that his mercy is forever, and that He forgives us. He already knows the darkness inside of us. He longs to heal it, but

that can't happen until we admit it, make restitution or reparation for it, and resolve to change.

We can do a daily examination of conscience. Many methods are out there, including the Benedictine Examination of Conscience found in the Saint Meinrad-published book, *Prayers and Rituals for Benedictine Oblates*.

If you haven't done this before, you can start now. If you started but quit, start again. We'll never be done with this discipline of self-examination until God calls us home. Until then, let us renew our commitment to the pursuit of holiness and seeing ourselves in the light of God.

Angie McDonald, oblate  
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## Self-awareness: Difficult but necessary for growth



Mark Plaiss

Surrendering to self-awareness is difficult. Doing so demands brutal honesty. Facing our foibles, confessing our vices and acknowledging

our weaknesses are not easy; our instinct is to shy away from them. The flip side, of course, is that we are aware of our strengths and our virtues, and that is certainly important. But being self-aware of that is a walk in the park.

The point of self-awareness is to bring about metanoia. Conversion means to

turn and go in the opposite direction, as in turning from vice and embracing virtue. Metanoia means going beyond what we know and learning to think in a new way. Metanoia cannot occur without a healthy dose of self-awareness.

In his Sermon 40 on confession, Bernard of Clairvaux writes, "The

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# Homily on Solemnity of St. Benedict



Archabbot Kurt  
Stasiak, OSB

*There was a man  
of venerable life  
named Benedictus  
— or, as the  
English language  
would translate it  
— blessed. That  
was Benedict:  
BLESSED both in  
grace and in  
name.*

So begins Pope St. Gregory the Great's *Second Book of Dialogues*. It's from these *Dialogues* that we find out most of what we know about the life of St. Benedict.

Read through the *Dialogues*, and you'll certainly see Benedict is a man of prayer. We read about him praying in a cave, praying in the fields, or even praying kneeling on the side of a cliff. Benedict prayed alone a lot. But he also prayed with his monks, with his twin sister Scholastica, and even with the heretical, Arian-inspired Goths.

A man of prayer, yes, but it's *ora et labora*, prayer and work. In Benedict's *Dialogues* are the kind of works we could only understand as miraculous. The *Dialogues* are full of Benedict's miracles.

For a modest sampling... You may have picked up that somewhat-strange verse in the sequence we sang before the Gospel, that part about "covering a brother's blunders and calling the toolhead back in place." Seems one of Benedict's monks was working in the field and had swung his sickle so hard the blade came off the handle and flew into the lake. Not to worry. Benedict prayed, snapped his fingers, and the blade flew out of the water and back onto its handle, thus allowing a clumsy

and embarrassed monk to get back to his daily chores.

Then there's a time when some monks were complaining about how difficult it was to walk from the monastery to a nearby lake. The path was steep and treacherous. The monks couldn't get to the lake. So Benedict brought the lake to them. Or at least he brought its water. He prayed, then piled three stones on top of each other, from which began to flow a never-ending stream.

Miracle after miracle, *Dialogues* is a small encyclopedia of Benedict's miracles.

Strangely, though, there's one miracle Pope St. Gregory doesn't record. Even stranger, it's the miracle some consider Benedict's greatest. Granted, many people today are suspicious of any talk of miracles. But this miracle is one we can't ignore. This is a miracle even cold, hard, objective science can't refute. It's a miracle we can see.

That miracle is us. And it's what we are doing here. It's what men and women have been doing, based upon Benedict's *Rule*, since the sixth century. It's what's been happening on this hill for almost 170 years. Young, middle-aged, and old; strong and weak; energetic and worn out; anxious and peaceful; graceful and sinful. That pretty much sums us up, I think.

With the Gospel as his guide, Benedict wrote a plan for us, a plan for us to seek God, not in spite of those who seem to put obstacles in our way, but through those very people, and with those very people.

Benedict called his plan a *Rule*, and since he's writing for those living in

community, many of the *Rule's* chapters deal with the domestic details of living together. Benedict sets out when, what, and how much his monks should eat and drink. He details what they should and should not wear when they travel or when they sleep. He tells them how to observe Lent. He gives the abbot all kinds of options for dealing with the disobedient.

You listen to the *Rule* for the first time and it appears as though St. Benedict must have been obsessive-compulsive. Details? He specifies the number of psalms that should be said each week (all 150 of them), how many possessions each monk should keep (not very many), and even how many times novices should be read the *Rule* before they take their vows (three). But, of course, many of Benedict's most impressive (and compassionate) chapters deal, not with how to read or what to eat and drink or when to do the laundry, but with how the brothers are to treat one another.

To put it succinctly, in living their common life, the brothers are to treat each other with the most uncommon charity. They are to support each other as they climb the 12 rungs on the ladder of humility. They are to climb together. It's not a matter of who gets to the top first. In fact, far from it. Benedict does not frown on competition among his monks; he encourages it, but only as regards who comes in first in showing respect to the other (72:6).

Not everyone here in this church this morning is a monk. But all of us — all of you — are Benedictine. If you're not, it's your own fault. Benedict's teachings, Benedict's spirit, has wrapped itself around this place tighter

than the skin on our bones. His words, his teachings, are everywhere on this hill. And every day we try to tease them out and practice them a little more.

Early on in his *Rule*, Benedict says he wants to establish a “school for the Lord’s service.” It’s not always a popular school, because there is homework every day. Some of the assignments are the bold perseverance of stability, the humble listening of obedience. And the major field of study, required for all, is the daily conversion of one’s ways for the better. There are study guides for our time in

this school for the Lord’s service. The Letter to the Ephesians is one. It tells us to “grow strong in the Lord, with the strength of his power, and to put on the full armor of God: the love of our mutual service, the willing obedience of our hearts, the energy of our commitments...”

Mark’s Gospel even sets before us a kind of oral exam. As we heard, the disciples are walking with Jesus, and as they entered the house, he asked them: “‘What were you arguing about on the way?’ But they remained silent. For they had been discussing among themselves on the way who was the greatest.”

There will come an end to our time in the school of the Lord’s service. Then, like any school, it will be time for the final exam. It has only one question and, good teacher that He is, the Lord has given it to us well in advance to make sure we have plenty of time to prepare. The question: “So, on this journey, just what were you discussing, what have you been doing, on the way?”

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paths to finding this way of confession ... are many ... the first path, and the first step on this way, is self-knowledge. This decree fell from heaven: ‘Human being, know yourself!’... Knowledge of self consists of three parts: that people know what they have done, what they have deserved, what they have lost” (*Monastic Sermons*, trans. Daniel Griggs, Cistercian Publications, 2016, p. 202-203).

In his Sermon 40, Bernard’s focus is on confession, and his injunction for self-knowledge is the first step toward confession. I see Bernard’s injunction for self-knowledge to be of value in the entire purpose of the Christian life: to change one’s life and embrace God.

I used to minister at the Indiana State Prison in Michigan City. One Sunday I was talking to an inmate, and another inmate walked by us. When that inmate was out of earshot, the inmate with whom I was speaking jerked his thumb toward the other

inmate and said, “At least I’m not like him!”

Such thinking is not limited to prisoners. We all say and think such things now and then. Yes, I have my sins, but I’m not that bad!

Self-awareness, however, exposes such self-righteousness and shines a spotlight on such presumption. The rock on which the beatitudes and the parables rest is self-awareness. “Blessed are the poor in spirit” is meaningless to a person who is unaware that he is full of himself. The hollowness of the Pharisee who prays in the same place as the tax collector is lost on a person filled with pride. The Gospel itself is babble to one who sees no need for forgiveness.

Self-awareness is a virtue we oblates must cultivate. Saint Meinrad Archabbey provides us with myriad tools for such cultivation: retreats, workshops, spiritual direction, a well-connected community, the Hours. I don’t think we would be oblates if

such tools didn’t spark the desire for self-awareness.

Self-awareness is not just for philosophers. Nor is self-awareness a one-time venture. Jesus asked the Twelve who they thought He was, and the rest of Jesus’ ministry was fleshing out that claim.

Likewise, we need to ask ourselves: who am I?

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# Signals in the Noise: Grumbling over sandcastles

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



Keith Jennings

Every other summer, my wife's family spends a week at Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. We cherish the time this gives us together.

With most of our kids entering young adulthood, we wonder if this is the last year everyone will make it. It's a bittersweet season of life.

Here is how each trip typically begins. Let's say my wife and I set a goal of pulling out of our driveway at 10 a.m. on travel day. Thinking we're clever, we tell our kids to be ready at 9:30 a.m. At 10 a.m. on the morning we're to leave, one kid is still in the bathroom. Another is sitting in the car. Another is nowhere to be found. And the fourth is wandering around the kitchen.

"We've got to go! Get in the van!" It's now 10:20 a.m. Three of our four kids are in the van, although one is already worried about getting carsick. The last one is still inside trying to find something completely irrelevant and unnecessary buried in a drawer stuffed so full of junk it won't close.

At 10:30 a.m., everyone is finally in the van! I crank the engine. The low tire pressure light comes on. "Sweetie, how long has this warning light been on?" "When do you think I have time to deal with that?!" I get out of the van, find the pump, and put air in the tire.

We're finally on our way! It's 10:40 a.m. I open the Waze app on my phone to discover there's a half-hour delay going through Atlanta. But it's

Atlanta, so it will add an hour or more to our travel time. By this point, my armpits are damp. My blood pressure is pulsing. And I'm grumbling. (I know this because my wife lets me know!)

Over the years, I have developed a Pavlovian stress response to going on vacation. My blood pressure now rises days before we actually leave. It's vacation! Isn't it supposed to be relaxing and fun?

Since becoming an oblate, when I find myself in situations like this, passages from the *Rule of St. Benedict* will surface, as frustration gets the better of me. "Do not grumble or speak ill of others" (*RB 4:39*). "Above all else ... refrain from grumbling" (*RB 40:9*). "First and foremost, there must be no word or sign of the evil of grumbling" (*RB 34:6*).

Here's the thing. Were St. Benedict tasked with getting my family in a van to leave on time, he would grumble. Actually, he would cuss. Out loud. (Well, it makes me feel better to think he would.)

Fast forward to a few days later. The whole family is basking in the sun on the beach. I find my attention drawn to my brother-in-law putting a lot of time and effort into building a sandcastle. By morning, it will be trampled, rained on or washed away by the tide. That's when it hits me.

Many things in my life are like sandcastles. As beautiful (or frustrating) as they can be, they are impermanent. They are moments among the movement of life. Where I work, we have a question we teach our employees to ask as they face tough situations. We tell them to imagine themselves five years from

now, looking back on this time. Then we ask them to contemplate this question: "What will I be most glad I did?"

Each time I reflect on this question, I realize that I'm going to look back on all the blessings I have in my life right now. My wife and kids. Our parents, who are all still with us. Our brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews. Our friends. My work, and the people I get to work with and serve. Our home and the birds, deer, fox, hens and other critters with whom we share space. Our church. Saint Meinrad Archabbey.

It makes me realize that I have a choice. I can grumble each time a metaphorical sandcastle I'm building gets messed up. Or I can look up and see the beauty of creation surrounding me and Christ in the people beside me. I can grumble. Or I can offer praise and thanksgiving.

The Benedictine way is teaching me to look up and out at the eternal blessings surrounding me, rather than looking down at the momentary inconveniences challenging me. When dealing with certain situations, I'll still grumble. But I'm realizing it's over things that don't matter in the long run. What really matters now, always and forever, is tuning into God's loving presence in me, with me and around me.

What sandcastles might you be grumbling over? Where is God in all this?

Five years from now, when you look back on this time in your life, what will you be glad you did?

Keith Jennings, oblate  
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# Self-awareness: One way to catch our blind spots



Deepak Frank

Self-awareness is required for humility, which means we must hold up a mirror to ourselves. The discomfort may nudge us to do something different.

However, this is important. This is the pruning of the vine that Jesus talks about in John 15:1-6.

Why do I need to know about myself? As a child, I was taught by parents and teachers. As an adult, I will not normally receive correction unless I seek it out. Ego may prevent openness to feedback, but if I look inside myself, what happens? I may see my faults. I may learn from them and change them.

Jesus was aware of his limits as a human. He was aware of his mission and He constantly reminded his disciples. The “Agony in the Garden” (*Matthew 26:36-46*) describes his anxiety about the suffering He was going to face. That self-awareness led him to prayer and obedience to the will of God.

On the contrary, St. Peter did not comprehend his limits at the Last Supper, but a rooster (*Matthew 26:75*) reminded him of them. The “Good Thief” on the cross was aware of his limitations as he went a step further in defending Jesus (*Luke 23:32-33, 39-43*).

In theory, Jesus’ coming should have changed everyone who learned about Him and met Him. That generation got something that no one else in history did. Refusal to learn, selfishness and arrogance blinded our

Savior’s deniers and tormentors. What more can we expect from God? He gave us his only Son! Hence, it is said that hell is a choice and God may need only to remind us of our choices and their impact during our judgment.

Self-awareness can help us catch our blind spots on earth when we still have time. Conscience can be our friend if we listen to it. Awareness requires stillness. Once distraction is gone, reflection may begin.

Slowing down, meditation, reflection and adoration are great tools to increase self-awareness and help with decision-making. What did I do in a similar position last time? What can I do to prevent past mistakes? It helps prevent recklessness and brings calm, serenity and satisfaction. We recognize our limits and our dependence on God.

Pope Benedict XVI gave a notable example when he resigned. He recognized his limits amid the steep demands of the papacy. God only expects us to try our best in impossible situations and will open a door or a window when we are busy banging our heads in frustration. As explained in “Calming the Storm,” Jesus expects us to focus on Him and He will take care of the rest (*Mark 4:35-41*).

Self-awareness also helps prepare us for difficult circumstances. It helps reduce grumbling by turning our focus on our blessings.

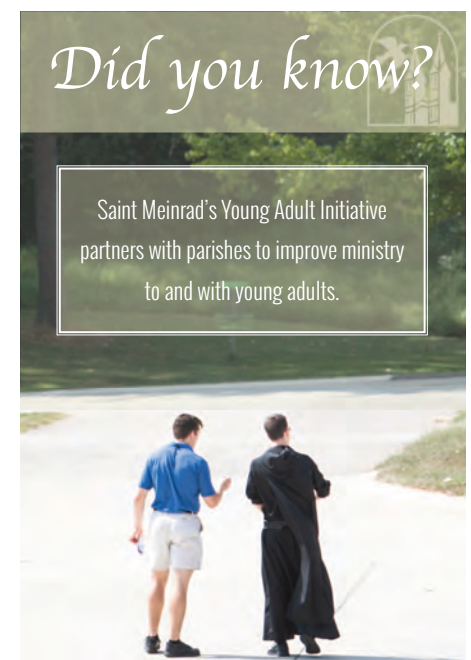
What comes after awareness? Understanding, gratitude, action and change are a few of the things that follow. Others include acceptance of our limits, prayers for patience, empathy, etc. Parking my selfishness

and thinking from the other’s point of view is a worthy goal for which to aim. Empathy is difficult, but we can start by asking questions and avoiding assumptions, as these come mostly from our own filters. Jesus expects compassion from us, as explained beautifully in the parable of the “Good Samaritan” (*Luke 10:25-37*).

If I live every moment being mindful that God is looking at me, I may strive to do better. I may move away from the false sense of security that there is always more time. How do I improve myself after awareness? I can become mindful of my bad habits, careless remarks and sins.

Humility reduces the self and fills the space opened with God and others. Jesus took in humiliation, then prayed for forgiveness of his abusers. So, self-awareness can help lead us to God by moving the focus to the Almighty and the neighbor. It is difficult. All we can do is keep trying!

Deepak Frank, oblate  
Columbus, IN



# Self-awareness begins with knowing yourself deeply



Susan McNamara

To borrow a phrase from literature, “to thine own self be true.” Polonius delivers this line in Act 1, Scene 3 of Shakespeare’s play, *Hamlet*, as he offers fatherly advice to his son

Laertes. This is one of many pieces of advice given, but let us look at this phrase in its completeness:

This above all: to thine own self be true,  
And it must follow, as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.

To be true to oneself requires a deep understanding of who you are. Contemplation may be the gateway to becoming more aware of the interiority of oneself. To learn anything, you must engage with your intellect, and to begin to know yourself is that process illumined by grace.

Each day we think about many things, but do we stop to consider the very nature of our thinking? How often do we reflect on our understanding through our biases, prejudices, fears, past traumas, triggers and weaknesses? What distortions might there be in our understanding?

Scripture admonishes us to “not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your minds, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect” (*Romans 12:2*). “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless,

indeed, you fail to meet the test!” (2 *Corinthians 13:5*).

Before confession, we are to examine our conscience in terms of our relationship to God, ourselves and others. We are invited to go further into ourselves to find the thoughts, attitudes, fears, half-truths, desires and unbalanced egos that may drive our actions in an unconscious way. How, then, may we claim to live an authentic life if we are indifferent to the truth? How can we be living the truth if we are living indifferently to justice?

“He who attempts to act and do things for others or for the world without deepening his own self-understanding, freedom, integrity, and capacity to love will not have anything to give others. He will communicate to them nothing but the contagion of his own obsessions, his aggressiveness, his ego-centered ambitions, his delusions about ends and means, his doctrinaire prejudices and ideas.” –Thomas Merton, *Thomas Merton: Spiritual Master*.

The goal here is not to dispense with our ego, but to bring it to a healthy balance, to move to a more loving and understanding empathy for others at a more interior dimension. We must find the courage to let go of the false self and to accept ourselves as Jesus accepts us.

Healing begins with accepting our own brokenness. This becomes the door through which the infinite mercy of God flows into our heart. Then, we are opened enough to receive the grace of God to move beyond our sinfulness and weaknesses and to live more authentically.

Addressing a gathering of monks, nuns, priests and others in Thailand,

Merton said, “All the mystical traditions of the great religions all teach us something about daily human consciousness that is impaired. It is impaired in its ability to see the infinite generosity flowing in and out of our lives.” And I would add, from God, where all creation is the very essence of the sacred.

Jesus modeled the authentic human being that embodied love for all persons. He invites us to a perpetual conversion process into a more Christ-like way of life. To reach the depths of ourselves is to journey for a lifetime. It is a process that does not end.

We must also learn to accept that which we may never know. Paraphrasing Merton again, the gift of the spiritual life is freedom from the need to understand everything. In the depths of things, I will never fully understand. It is infinite. However, to accept that you cannot fully understand is within itself a deeper way of understanding.

In his book, *Thoughts in Solitude*, Merton states, “There is no greater disaster in spiritual life than to be immersed in unreality, for life is maintained and nourished in us by our vital relation with realities outside and above us. When our life feeds on unreality, it must starve. It must, therefore, die.”

The spiritual life is not a mental life. It is not thought alone. Nor does the spiritual life exclude thought and feeling. It needs both. If we are to live, we must be alive, body, soul, mind, heart and spirit. The action of God must elevate and transform everything in love and faith.

Susan McNamara, oblate  
Bloomington, IN

# Cultivate self-awareness for spiritual growth



Lawrence V. McCrobie

Self-awareness is the ability to understand and recognize one's thoughts, feelings and behaviors. It is an essential component of emotional intelligence and a

critical skill for personal and professional growth. The term "self-awareness" has been around for centuries, and it has been studied extensively in psychology, philosophy and neuroscience. Despite its importance, many people struggle to develop self-awareness or don't fully understand what it means.

Catholic self-awareness is the ability to understand oneself in the light of the Catholic faith. It involves an ongoing process of reflection and examination of one's thoughts, feelings and actions, as well as an understanding of how they relate to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

At the core of Catholic self-awareness is the recognition that we are created in the image and likeness of God, and that our ultimate purpose in life is to know, love and serve Him. This understanding forms the foundation for our relationship with God and with others, and it helps us make sense of the challenges and struggles we face in our daily lives.

To cultivate Catholic self-awareness, one can engage in practices such as prayer, reflection and examination of conscience. These practices help us to deepen our understanding of our strengths and weaknesses and to identify areas in which we need to grow and improve.

Additionally, participating in the sacraments of the Catholic Church, such as confession and the Eucharist, can help us to develop a deeper sense of self-awareness and to grow in our relationship with God.

## Benefits of Self-Awareness

Self-awareness has numerous benefits for personal and professional development. Here are some of the most significant ones:

1. *Improved emotional intelligence:* Self-awareness is a critical component of emotional intelligence, which is the ability to understand and manage one's emotions and the emotions of others. By developing self-awareness, we can better understand our emotions and how they impact our behavior, which helps us better regulate our emotions.
2. *Better relationships:* Self-awareness helps us understand how we impact others and how they perceive us. This understanding can lead to better communication and stronger relationships.
3. *Improved decision-making:* When we are self-aware, we are better able to recognize our biases and how they may influence our decisions. This awareness allows us to make more objective decisions and avoid making decisions based on unconscious biases.
4. *Personal growth:* Self-awareness is essential for personal growth. When we understand our strengths and weaknesses, we can focus on areas that need improvement and develop new skills and habits.

5. *Professional growth:* Self-awareness is also essential for professional growth. When we understand our strengths and weaknesses, we can better identify opportunities for growth and development.

## Cultivating Self-Awareness

Cultivating self-awareness is an ongoing process that requires self-reflection and introspection. Here are some strategies for developing self-awareness:

1. *Practice mindfulness:* Mindfulness is the practice of being present in the moment and observing our thoughts and emotions without judgment. Mindfulness meditation is an effective way to cultivate self-awareness.
2. *Keep a journal:* Writing down our thoughts and feelings can help us better understand them. Keeping a journal allows us to reflect on our experiences and emotions and identify patterns and triggers.
3. *Seek feedback:* Asking others for feedback on our behavior and performance can help us better understand how others perceive us. It's important to seek feedback from people we trust and who have our best interests at heart.
4. *Practice self-reflection:* Taking time to reflect on our experiences, emotions and behavior can help us identify patterns and triggers and better understand our strengths and weaknesses.
5. *Take assessments:* Many assessments are available that can help us better understand our personality, values and strengths.

*Continued on page 12*



These assessments can provide valuable insights into our behavior and help us identify areas for growth.

Self-awareness is an essential skill for personal and professional development. It involves understanding and recognizing our thoughts, feelings and behaviors, as well as how they impact others. Developing self-awareness requires ongoing self-reflection, mindfulness,

seeking feedback from others, and taking assessments to better understand our personality and strengths.

The benefits of self-awareness are numerous and can lead to improved emotional intelligence; better relationships; improved decision-making; and personal, spiritual and professional growth. By becoming more self-aware, we can better understand ourselves and others,

which can lead to more fulfilling and successful lives.

Overall, Catholic self-awareness is an ongoing process of growth and development, as we strive to live in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic faith and to deepen our relationship with God.

*Lawrence V. McCrobie, Ed.D., oblate  
Elizabethtown, KY*

## A review of 'Lent Through the Holy Land' retreat



*Tom Yost*

I signed up for the March 19-21 retreat early. It had been a while since I had attended an oblate retreat at Saint Meinrad.

The title intrigued me.

Influenced by

the person giving the retreat, Fr. Denis Robinson, OSB, whom I had heard speak before, and having never been to the Holy Land, I was excited to attend. I believe God wanted me to be there.

There are many layers to Lent. It is a time to repent and believe in the Gospel. A time of conversion and growing closer to Christ. It is a time of healing, reconciliation, baptismal renewal and intentional discipleship. We take up our cross and follow Jesus. It is a time to seek redemption and embrace salvation offered by the Son of God. This retreat was time for uncovering and discovering these layers.

People and places in the Bible were the focus. The titles of the talks emphasized people, and the places we

find the people added important context. The places also gave us clues about the status of the people God chose to carry out the plan of salvation. Fr. Denis used video clips from "The Chosen" series to begin each talk.

The first talk was "Easter is about an Old Man and a Baby." We contrasted the appearance of the Angel Gabriel to Zachariah – a likely rich and powerful priest – to Mary – a little poor girl from "nowhere" Nazareth. Zachariah represents a muted "old" faith, and the birth of Jesus (the Messiah), in the presence of Mary and poor shepherds, the ushering of a "new" faith. In conclusion, Fr. Denis posed this thought: "This new religion is perhaps not a religion of powerful priests, but a religion of outcast shepherds."

The second talk was "Easter is about a Woman." Mary of Magdala was prominently featured in this talk and has an important role among the disciples as illustrated by "The Chosen." Fr. Denis spoke briefly of the town of Magdala, but spoke at length about St. Luke's portrayal of women. St. Luke gives women power, which is so unlike the time and place

of the Holy Land.

Mary of Magdala accompanied Jesus, the Twelve and the other disciples. She was courageous with Jesus at the foot of the cross. She was the first to witness the empty tomb and the risen Jesus. Fr. Denis described her as the "glue" among the apostles and disciples. She was an "Apostle of the Heart" who knew the heart of Jesus the most.

The third talk was "Easter is about a Fisherman." This talk referenced Capernaum and the Sea of Galilee. It was an area where Jesus approached many of the Twelve to "Come follow me." There was nothing extraordinary about the people Jesus called. Among them were fishers, tax collectors and zealots. Half of them were likely illiterate. Fr. Denis suggested that this "motley crew" should give us all hope as we follow Jesus from Lent into Easter!

The final talk was "Easter is about Us." The Bible offers many encounters between Jesus and people with no name. This list would include "the man born blind," "the woman at the well," "the man who had two sons," "the woman caught in

adultery,” “the rich man (and Lazarus)” and more. Fr. Denis said the Bible is a touchstone for life and that the lack of names in the Gospels is significant. It is here where we

insert ourselves into the story. We are that man or that woman.

In conclusion, Fr. Denis told us, “As the people of God, we should look

after all those with ‘no name’ because that is what God does.”

*Tom Yost, oblate  
New Albany, IN*

## Consider the details of the Easter Gospels



*Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB*

When talking to my students about biblical narrative, I make a distinction between realistic and significant details. Realistic details give us information about the way things are. They

may or may not be factual, but they seem factual because they reveal our real-world experience.

Other details convey larger ideas. Grey hair signifies wisdom. Some details are both realistic and significant. If we take them just as a realistic detail, then we miss their larger significance.

For example, the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us that several women went to the tomb of Jesus at daybreak. No men come with them. Is it significant that only women came and not men, or was that just the way it was? I know some women who would say it was definitely significant.

Also, John’s Gospel has Mary Magdalen coming to the tomb by herself. Since that differs from the other Gospels, John invites us to wonder about its significance.

Or take the person announcing the resurrection of Jesus. Every Gospel has a different person. The nitpickers would jump on differences and argue that the Gospels contradicted

themselves. These differences, however, reveal something of what is significant in each Gospel.

In Matthew’s Gospel, an angel, just one and not two as in John, descends from heaven, rolls back the stone, and sits on it. His appearance is like lightning, and he has snow-white clothing. Angels appear early in Matthew’s Gospel in the dreams of Joseph. Like their name in Hebrew and Greek, an angel is God’s messenger bringing God’s authoritative word: Jesus “is not here, for he has been raised just as he said.”

Mark’s Gospel is more enigmatic. When the women get to the tomb, they find the stone rolled back, and Mark says: “On entering the tomb they saw a young man sitting on the right side, clothed in a white robe, and they were utterly amazed” (16:5). They do not find an angel but instead “a young man.”

This Greek word, *νεανίσκος*, appears only one other time in Mark. There it describes “a young man” in the garden of Gethsemane, who is following Jesus. The Gospel tells us that this young man is “wearing nothing but a linen cloth about his body,” and when those with Judas try to seize him, he leaves “the cloth behind” and runs “off naked.”

Is that naked young man now sitting in the tomb, clothed “in a white robe,” announcing: “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, the crucified. He has been

raised. He is not here.” What does this young man with his white robe signify? Surely this is more than a realistic detail.

Luke tells us that the women get into the tomb and find it empty. While they are puzzling over this, “behold, two men in dazzling garments appeared to them.” Note Luke doesn’t say angels, a word he uses elsewhere to describe the messenger to Zachary, Mary and the shepherds. Here Luke says, “two men in dazzling garments.”

In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke tells us that “two men in white robes” show up at the ascension of Jesus, asking why people are looking up to heaven. At the transfiguration with Jesus in dazzling white clothing, two men appear conversing with him: Moses and Elijah. Luke has Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets announce the resurrection of Jesus.

As noted above, John’s account begins with Mary Magdalen arriving at the tomb alone. While the other Gospels say at daybreak or dawn, John says, “It was still dark.” Now is that a realistic detail or a significant detail? In English, you can talk about being in the dark, meaning you don’t understand, and that is the case here, as John’s Gospel makes clear.

Seeing the stone removed, Mary concludes that the body has been taken and runs to tell Simon Peter and the one whom Jesus loved. The

*Continued on page 14*

Beloved Disciple outruns Simon Peter but does not enter. Many see that as a significant detail, acknowledging Simon Peter's primacy.

While waiting, the Beloved Disciple bends down and sees the burial cloths. This is one of many realistic yet significant details that I have begun to notice in John's Gospel. If the body has been taken, why have the burial cloths been left? Why would a grave robber bother to unwrap the body?

When Peter arrives, he goes in and finds burial cloths with the piece covering the head rolled up in a separate place. That detail tells us something about intentionality. What has happened here has not been haphazard or even spontaneous with things flying everywhere. Someone has bothered to roll up the head cloth and place it in a separate place intentionally.

This detail is both ordinary and strange. Its concreteness gives a sense of things being realistic and normal. But such orderliness in a tomb is also strange. Somehow, all is not normal.

The Gospel then tells us that "the other disciple ... went in, ... and he saw and believed." He saw and believed. What did he see that made him believe? The only thing to see was an empty tomb with the burial cloths strangely arranged just so. What did he see that allowed him to believe? Something strange is going on.

The Gospel of John explores the connection between seeing and believing. In the opening chapter, Nathaniel believes because Jesus says that He saw him under a fig tree. In Chapter 4, Jesus says: "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will not believe." And in Chapter 6, people ask: "What sign can you do

that we may see and believe in you?" And after the raising of Lazarus, we hear that many who had "seen what [Jesus] had done began to believe in him."

In the scene to come, when they tell Thomas that they have seen the Risen Christ, he defiantly asserts: "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands and put my finger into the nail marks and put my hand into his side, I will not believe." A week later, when Jesus appears and has Thomas do just that, Jesus says to Thomas: "Have you come to believe because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and have believed."

That's us. The Gospel is talking about us. We have not seen what Thomas saw. Like the Beloved Disciple who has seen only the empty tomb, we have believed, and we are trying to understand what we believe.

I don't want to forget Mary Magdalen. After the two disciples leave, she, still distraught, sees two angels in the empty tomb who ask why she is weeping. Turning, she sees a man she does not recognize until he calls her name. Only with this most personal detail, the sound of her name, does she recognize the Risen Christ.

Amid the passion, the Evangelist affirms: "An eyewitness has testified, and his testimony is true; he knows he is speaking the truth, so that you also may [come to] believe." What the Gospel sees it shows to us so that we may see and believe.


So where in our lives do we meet the angel sitting on the stone or the young man clothed in white? Where do we meet Moses and Elijah, where the Beloved Disciple, or Thomas or Mary Magdalen? Where are the

women today who have gone early to the tomb? This paschal candlestand (in the Archabbey Church), with its rings showing women from the Old Testament until today, celebrates women as the first to hear the news of the resurrection. This stand with its candle testifies witnesses are still among us.

The Gospel calls us to find the Risen Christ in the reality of our lives; it calls us to see in our lives what the Gospel shows us so that we may see and then believe.


And even more! The Gospel calls us, we who are baptized – the Gospel calls us to be the angel and the young man in white, to be Moses and Elijah. The Gospel calls us to be Simon Peter, the Beloved Disciple, and Thomas, to be the women and Mary Magdalen. For the Gospel calls us to go forth and announce: "He has been raised from the dead.... Behold, I have told you." Go forth and tell people everywhere what you have seen and what you believe.

*Fr. Harry Hagan, OSB  
Saint Meinrad Archabbey*



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# Meet a Monk: Br. James Jensen, OSB



*Br. James Jensen, OSB*

How can a young man in the prime of life with a great career know if he should continue on this path or go a different way?

It was 2009. For a while, Br. James Jensen had felt that pull to go deeper with God. Sunday Mass was great; going to daily Mass as well was even better. Praying the usual prayers was great; integrating nightly Compline into his prayer life was even better. A solid job in accounting was great; experiencing that transcendent encounter with Jesus – that had to be better.

Time to retreat from the usual routine. Br. James packed his bags and came to Saint Meinrad Archabbey to get quiet and listen for what God wanted him to do. Was it coincidental that a vocational discernment retreat was underway at the same time?

“I couldn’t really shake it,” he recalls of this possible calling to a monastic vocation. Should he or shouldn’t he?

He needed to know more, even as he continued with his increased Mass attendance and his nightly Compline prayer.

In November, he returned to the Archabbey to meet with the vocation director, as well as with several of the monks. When asked if he would consider a novitiate, Br. James said he would love to. “What if God is calling me?” he remembers asking. He needed to try this while also realizing that he needed help beyond himself to make this decision.

On August 6, 2013 – 10 years ago this summer – Br. James took the plunge and professed his first vows as a Benedictine monk of Saint Meinrad Archabbey. His quest for a deeper walk with God seems to have been answered. “It’s been a real blessed life for me,” he says.

That life has many elements. One of Br. James’ assignments is that of vestry director. Every two to three weeks, he drives to the store to buy

toiletries and other sundry items for the monastic community. Going shopping allows Br. James to exercise “charity for the community,” saving the monks the trouble of obtaining these items on their own.

Besides his work in the vestry, Br. James’ primary job is to develop relationships with donors to the Archabbey through the Development Office.

He also serves as almoner, helping local outreach efforts to the poor and the homeless and supporting other Catholic charities. In the Seminary and School of Theology, he co-teaches a class on parish administration. His strong accounting background, which includes degrees in business administration and accounting science, and his CPA in corporate finance, is put to good use here.

During the summer, he puts in full-time hours working with college interns and assisting with Saint Meinrad’s “One Bread, One Cup” program.

Whatever the need, Br. James is ready to respond. He believes that oblates can emulate this same attitude of openness, asking, “How is God calling us now? Has this been updated since we became oblates?”

Whether monk or oblate, we depend on God, he says. “He sustains us, and we respond to His grace ... the oblate community is an extension [of the Archabbey] in which our relationship with Jesus Christ is always developing and growing.”

*Angie McDonald, oblate  
Huntingburg, IN*

# A mathematical and spiritual journey with the Archabbey Church pavement

## Part 2: The geometry of Cosmatesque mosaics

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



Maureen Reichardt

In January of 2003, I began studies in the lay master's degree program at Saint Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology. Late in the evening on the night before

my first class, I crept into a dim and empty Archabbey Church, lay down prostrate on the floor – right in the middle of one of the large triangles – and prayed for God's help.

From my first encounter with the church floor, through my master's degree program and into the present day, the geometric marble pavement has become my "spiritual touchstone": a place I can return to again and again to be reminded of my spiritual journey and my relationship with God, a place where I feel centered and complete.

In the first article in this series about the Archabbey Church pavement, I mentioned that the design of the floor in the renovated church was inspired by a style of mosaic called Cosmatesque, which was used abundantly in Rome during the 12th and 13th centuries. Here in Part Two, I will explore the geometry of Cosmatesque mosaics in more detail.

During the summer of 2006, I was awarded a Lilly Endowment Teacher Creativity Fellowship grant for my project, "Cosmatesque Mosaics: A Mathematical and a Spiritual Journey."

One of the highlights of my project was a three-week trip to Rome to photograph and sketch Cosmatesque mosaics, particularly in the 12th-century Basilica of San Clemente.

A second benefit of my project was the opportunity to meet architect Ben Nicholson, a scholar of Italian medieval and Renaissance pavements who was hired by Saint Meinrad to design the floor of the Archabbey Church during the 1996-97 renovation. I owe many of my insights about Cosmatesque mosaics and their influence on the design of the Archabbey Church pavement to my conversations with Mr. Nicholson.

Although the work of the Cosmati artisans was influenced by classical Roman mosaics as well as by Byzantine and Islamic patterns, their work is unique in its overall design and is easily distinguished from these other three styles. While there are certainly variations in Cosmatesque designs from church to church and from artisan to artisan, there are significant similarities evident in most examples of Cosmatesque work.

Cosmatesque mosaics, with few exceptions, are composed strictly of abstract geometric patterns, as opposed to classical Roman or Byzantine mosaics, which often contain pictorial elements. The mosaic method employed by the Cosmati can be classified as *opus sectile* ("cut work"), a method that uses mosaic pieces cut to various polygonal and circular shapes, as opposed to *opus tessellatum* (used

commonly in classical Roman and Byzantine mosaic work), which uses only small square pieces of tile called *tesserae*.

Just as medieval church builders used *spolia* (antique columns and other materials from ruined classical Roman sites) in their constructions, Cosmati artisans also made use of antique marble in a variety of colors: primarily red, green, yellow, white and black. Due to the availability of antique marble in Rome and the difficulty of transporting the materials to other locations, Cosmatesque work appears primarily in Rome and its immediate vicinity.<sup>1</sup>

A fundamental design component of a typical Cosmatesque pavement is the framework of white marble bands that forms a large grid of squares, rectangles and circles on the pavement [Image 1]. The spaces created by the framework are filled with geometric patterns formed by colored *opus sectile* marble.

When a visitor walks into any church containing a Cosmatesque pavement, the first design element observed is usually a *guilloche* that runs along the longitudinal axis of the church – from the entrance through the nave (and if present, the schola) to the apse [Image 1].

The *guilloche* pattern can be described as an interlacing ribbon design that surrounds a linear series of circular disks. In a typical Cosmatesque pavement, the interlacing ribbon of the *guilloche* is composed of three smaller

bands: a middle *opus sectile* band surrounded by two plain white marble bands.

In Cosmatesque pavements, the path of the *guilloche* is often interrupted by a second major design element called a *quincunx* [Image 2]. The *quincunx* design is composed of five shapes: a central shape (usually circular but sometimes square or rectangular), surrounded by four circles. Just as in a *guilloche*, the five shapes in a *quincunx* are connected with interlacing bands of marble.

In the Archabbey Church, the eyes of the observer will likely be drawn from the *guilloche* to two other prominent design features. One of these is the large Star of David design formed using smaller triangles-within-triangles [Image 3]. The triangle-within-triangle pattern and a related square-within-square motif are commonly used in

classical Roman, Byzantine and Cosmatesque pavements.

In the book *Cosmatesque Ornament: Flat Polychrome Patterns in Architecture*, architect Paloma Pajares-Ayuela theorizes that using smaller and smaller pieces of marble within each of these designs allowed the Cosmati artisans to make the best use of the salvaged scraps of marble available to them.

Another design feature of the Archabbey Church pavement likely to attract an observer's attention is the almond- (or fish-) shaped pattern that extends into the aisles [Image 4]. This design is appropriately called a *mandorla* (Italian, "almond") or a *vesica piscis* (Latin, "fish bladder").

Although the *mandorla* is not a common element of Cosmatesque design, architect Ben Nicholson was aware of its inclusion in the 12th-

century church pavement of the Benedictine Abbey of Montecassino.<sup>2</sup> As they planned the design for the new floor, the architects and monks decided that including the *mandorla* was fitting because it is an ancient symbol of Christ.

Taken as a whole, Cosmatesque pavements impress the viewer with their beauty, their intricate and orderly patterns, and their bold colors. But beyond the artistic elements of the designs, there is much more to be discovered.

In Parts Three and Four of this series, I will explore the theological symbolism conveyed by the geometric patterns in the Archabbey Church pavement. If you have questions or comments, email me at [mreichardt9634@comcast.net](mailto:mreichardt9634@comcast.net).

Maureen Reichardt, oblate  
Indianapolis, IN

<sup>1</sup> A notable exception to this rule is the altar pavement of London's Westminster Abbey, which was executed by Italian Cosmati artisans in 1268.

<sup>2</sup> Recall, from Part One, that the pavement of the Church of the Abbey of Montecassino is considered to be the immediate antecedent to Cosmatesque pavements.



Image 3: Archabbey Church floor, looking west.

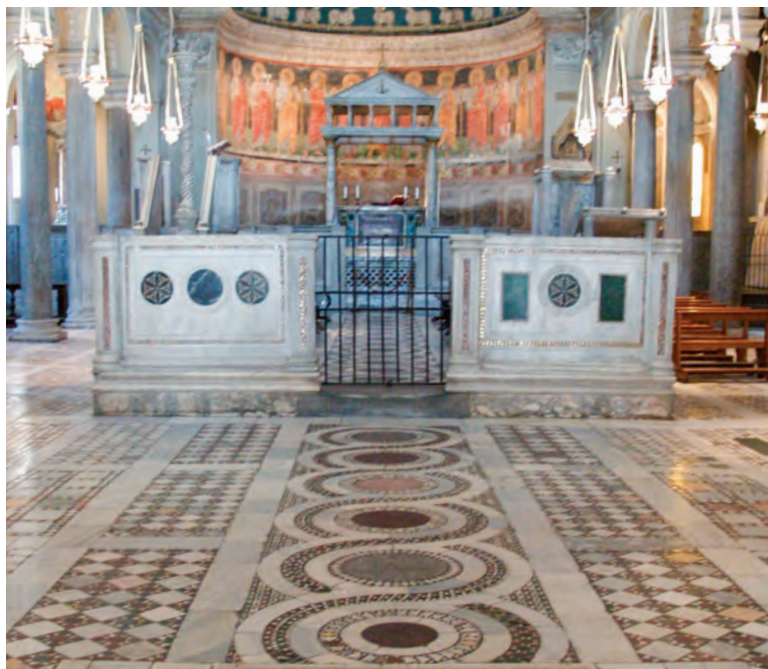


Image 1: Cosmatesque pavement, Basilica of San Clemente, Rome.

Continued on page 18





Image 2: Cosmatesque pavement, Basilica of San Crisogano, Rome. Inner quincunx: four circles surround a fifth circle; outer quincunx: four circles surround a square.



Image 4: Archabbey Church floor, showing a portion of an almond-shaped mandorla design.



### Got a hobby?

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

How long has this been a hobby?

What got you interested?

How is it challenging?

Why do you enjoy it?

**Does this hobby enhance your life as an oblate?**

Send article to [kpolskyoblate@yahoo.com](mailto:kpolskyoblate@yahoo.com)



Fr. Mateo Zamora, OSB, leads a practice through the oblate rites before the ceremony begins on March 11.

# OBLATE NEWS

## CHAPTER WELCOMES OBLATES, GUESTS

The South Bend/Mishawaka Oblate Chapter meets from 6 to 7 p.m. on the third Monday of each month in the St. Bavo Community Room (511 W. 7th St., Mishawaka, IN). Oblates and others interested in Saint Meinrad are welcome to join us. We pray Vespers and hold discussions. For more information or to get on the email list for meeting announcements and reminders, email Tim Allegat at [allegat@bellsouth.net](mailto:allegat@bellsouth.net).

## DEATHS

**Wilma Riedford**, of Haubstadt, IN, died on February 21, 2023.

**Claire Arnett**, of Reynoldsburg, OH, died on March 6, 2023.

**James E. Pfaff**, of Greenwood, IN, died on September 27, 2022.

**Nancy A. Lux**, of Bloomington, IN, died on March 30, 2023.

**Clara M. Pascucci**, of Yonkers, NY, died on December 11, 2019.

## INVESTITURES

The following were invested as oblate novices on March 11, 2023: Jeanne Baldwin, Frankfort, KY; Brandon Dasinger, Ball Ground, GA; Jeffrey Martin, Lafayette, IN; Alfred Sarno Jr., Brockton, MA; Deborah Whitney-Scott, Westerville, OH; Daniel Sebastianelli, Burke, VA; and Holly Smith, Louisville, KY. ♦

## OBLATIONS

The following made their final oblation on March 11, 2023: Sanford Berenberg, Liberty, KY; Mary Ellen Burkart, Columbus, IN; Joy Foster, Indianapolis, IN; Ellen Godbey, Yosemite, KY; Margaret Hendrixson, Bloomington, IN; Terry Hickey, Carmel, IN; Keith Jennings, Milton,

GA; Marlene Knapp, Sycamore, IL; Terrence Knapp, Sycamore, IL; Thomas Konechnik, Indianapolis, IN; Myles Piotrowski, Flora, IN; William Sabota, Schwenksville, PA; Cynthia Stilley, Marian, IL; and David Tate, West Lafayette, IN. ♦

## TRANSFER OF OBLATION

Dignora Fromm and Ervin Fromm, both of Liberty, KY. ♦

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**Investiture and Oblation Rites:**

September 23, 2023; no rites in December 2023; March 2, 2024

**Oblate Retreats:** Novice Oblate

Retreat, July 28-30, 2023; December 8-10, 2023; March 19-21, 2024

**Oblate Council and Finance**

**Committee Meetings:** Zoom meeting; October 13-15, 2023 ♦

## VOLUNTEERS APPRECIATED

Recent volunteers in the Oblate Office were Benedictine monks Archabbot Kurt Stasiak, Br. Michael Reyes, Br. Gregory Morris, Novice Travis Server, Novice Angel Romero-Olivas, Fr. Eugene Hensell, Fr. Joseph Cox, Fr. Mateo Zamora, Fr. Meinrad Brune, Fr. Lorenzo Penalosa, Fr. Denis Quinkert, Fr. Colman Grabert, Fr. Jeremy King, Fr. Gueric DeBona, Fr. Harry Hagan, Br. Martin Erspamer, Br. James Jensen, Br. John Mark Falkenhain, Fr. Thomas Gricoski, Br. Joel Blaize, Fr. Adrian Burke, Br. Francis de Sales Wagner, and oblates Dr. Bill Wilson, Marie Kobos, Michelle Blalock, Maureen and Paul Reichardt, Teresa Lynn, Rick Tomsick, Chris Topa, Andy Kosegi, Joanna Harris, newsletter editor Kathleen Polansky, and assistant editor Angie McDonald. ♦

## We REALLY want you and your articles!

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

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

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

### Upcoming themes and submission dates:

Fall – Final due date Aug. 1, 2023 (Distribution of Goods)  
Winter – Final due date Nov. 1, 2023 (Listening/Attentiveness)



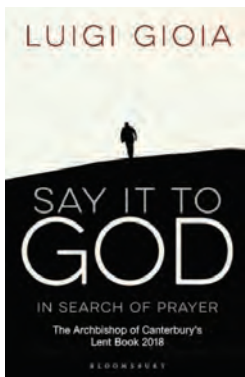
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## Reading Room



*Say it to God: In Search of Prayer* by Luigi Gioia, Bloomsbury Continuum, 2018. 240 pages.

During this past Lenten season, I submitted my *bona opera* to Archabbot Kurt, which included a short but engaging book on prayer.

Written by renowned Benedict scholar and monk Fr. Luigi Gioia, OSB, *Say it to God: In Search of Prayer* is a practical, contemplative guide to Christian prayer.

It begins with a spiritual diagnosis of common fears, hopes and inevitable pitfalls we encounter in

our perpetual beginnings with prayer. Fr. Gioia, informed by years of spiritual direction and intellectual scholarship, leads the reader from their isolated periphery to intimate communion with God through the lens of Jesus' unceasing prayer to the Father.

The Our Father, its inner depths of communion and love, lies at the heart of Fr. Gioia's firm conviction that God wishes nothing more than for us to say our thoughts and desires to Him with openness and humility.

*Br. Gregory Morris, OSB  
Saint Meinrad Archabbey*