

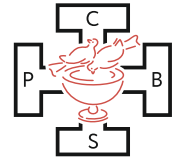


Benedictine Oblates of
The World Community for
Christian Meditation

To be effective and credible, community has also to be forged together in common and enduring spiritual experience. It must have essentially the same way of apprehending the spiritual reality. In each member of the community there must be a serious commitment to the deepening of their own personal experience.

John Main
Community of Love

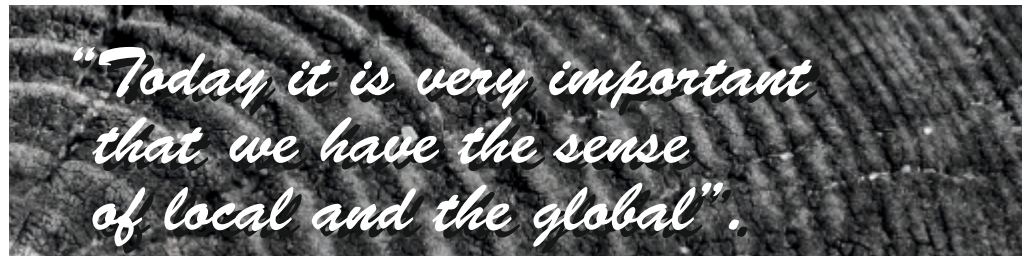
The World
Community
for Christian
Meditation



MESSAGE FROM FATHER LAURENCE

I am here at Bonnevaux and I want to wish you a very happy Saint Benedict's Day, 2019.

This is our first Saint Benedict's day here in Bonnevaux! It has been a very wonderful and festive day. A very full day as we have had visitors from around the world. We celebrated Mass, with meditation of course, at midday and we also had a wonderful BBQ provided by our Brazilian oblate community Tanya, Marco and Klara yesterday evening. Around the world a celebration like this unites people and it unites us in our particular culture, our own particular place and we celebrate in our own particular way. It is very important that we have this sense today I think of local and the global. We need to be grounded locally in our own place where we have roots and where we belong, where we have a home. It is a really deeply human this need, and it is what we call stability. And at the same time we can't become insular or nationalistic. One of the problems of our modern world is that we are becoming frightened of the global consciousness. So many movements today are looking away from the global reality of humanity, the universal family and just staying with their nationalistic family.



Saint Benedict has a very important lesson for us all, it is, 'If we become truly local, truly grounded and rooted in our place, then we will be open to receive the wisdom and the gifts and the visits and to respond to the needs of people from all over the world. We will feel that we belong to a universal human family. And the mystery of this for us of course, and Saint Benedict himself, is the mystery of Christ. Christ is within us in the most deeply and personal and intimate way - 'Christ within you' – and this same Christ is the cosmic Christ, the Christ who is building up his body not only on this planet among human race but indeed cosmically. So this is the way of understanding I think that Benedict allows us to make sense of in a practical way. The vow of Stability we take as oblates and monks is about belonging and allowing ourselves to belong and allowing ourselves to be known by the people that we share community with

the people who come to know us and see our faults and our foibles. And we also have in the wisdom of St. Benedict this vow of Obedience which is a deep listening. A listening to the word of God active and penetrating and sharp and sometimes painful, teaching us truths that we would rather not learn, teaching us to let go of illusions and false ideas that we have become attached to. The word of God can be painful, 'sharp as a double edged sword' as the Letter to the Hebrews tells us. But this allows us to listen and to listen with our whole being and to allow the work of the liberating, enriching word of God to take place within us, if we allow it to happen. The other great vow we live locally and globally is the vow of Conversion- the readiness to change and realise that life is about change. And although it seems to me more and more that in human affairs we can see that people are frightened of change, sometimes we are frightened to change even circumstances where we are unhappy. We prefer to remain unhappy because it is familiar to us. But the commitment to change and transformation is central to Benedict's vision of the spiritual life.

A very blessed and happy Saint Benedict's day from Bonnevaux all of us here send you our love. If you come and visit us in the near future either on your own or with other oblates we would be delighted to welcome you to your home here at Bonnevaux.

Laurence Freeman OSB

Laurence



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LETTER FROM EILEEN DUTT International Oblate Co-Ordinator

'To be effective and credible, this community has also to be forged together in some common and enduring spiritual experience. In other words, it must have essentially the same way of apprehending the spiritual reality. In each member of the community there must be a serious commitment to the deepening of their own personal experience. There must also be a double sense of responsibility: in the first place, each must understand their need of the encouragement, support and love of the community; in the second, each must be aware of their own importance for providing encouragement, support and love to others. (John Main – Community of Love p.23)

Fr. John shared those words when keynote speaker at a congress of Canadian University Chaplains, in Kingston, Ontario. Fr. Laurence goes on to remind us, 'But the issues raised are universal ones - the nature of a spiritual community, the relation between the personal and the absolute in the religious experience, the role of the spiritual teacher, the dynamic of commitment, community, communication.

I came across this passage one evening when searching for something from Fr John to share with the online group I was due to lead next evening. At the time I was searching for a particular piece which I eventually found, and used, but the aforementioned passage is the one that took root in my heart and I have re-turned to ponder the wisdom of it, often.

Taking encouragement from this passage I would now like to explore with Chaplaincy Team at Newcastle University the possibility of offering a Christian meditation group there - according to

the University website they offer groups for mindfulness meditation and also Buddhist meditation but as far as I can see not Christian meditation but it could be the information is out of date, of course.

To get the ball rolling I have made UK National Coordinator and respective Regional Area Coordinator aware of my plan and in keeping with Fr. John's teaching they offered me the 'encouragement, support and love' I needed to continue.

I also received the same encouragement when I shared a very interesting conference call with Tony Mazurkiewicz, a Senior Advisor John Main Centre, Georgetown University. He shared a phrase I have since made my own - *"It's not who we are but whose we are."* Dear oblates let our aim always be to make sure our Benedictine community reflects the wisdom of these words so that we become the *'effective and credible community'* Fr. John envisioned. As I move forward on this new venture I take as my inspiration Fr John's words and *'Be still before the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.'* (Ps 37,7)

Moving on to oblate community matters! Final Oblations have taken place in Australia, Brazil, Canada, Mexico (took place in Vancouver), New Zealand, UK and USA. There is also growth in the number of mentor/mentee partnerships spanning national oblate community boundaries. Sharing strengths and wisdom in this way will, I am sure, help us achieve common goals.

National Oblate Coordinators. At the beginning of this year Hugh McLaughlin, NOC for New Zealand, spoke with Fr. Laurence about stepping aside. We have so much to thank Hugh not least the way he has nurtured a true spirit of community

amongst NZ oblates! A good example of this that he has already identified Jo Ward as his successor and to assist a smooth transition of the role Hugh has worked closely with Jo on the coordination of NZ Oblate groups during this year. Thank you, Hugh!

David McKenna, who last year succeeded me as UK NOC, has, for personal reasons, stepped down. I know during his short time as NOC he conscientiously applied himself to the role so with grateful thanks for his service and with our love we wish him, and Christine his wife who is also an oblate - the very best for the future. After a lot of thought, and prayer, and taking into consideration counsel received from wise and trusted UK oblates, and with the full knowledge of Fr. Laurence, we have created a UK Oblate Counsel (UKOC) to guide the community moving forward. The counsel consists of four members: Angela Gregson; Gilly Withers; Janet Robbins and Julia Williamson. A strong team! Over the years each in their own way have served not only our oblate community but the work of WCCM also; again Fr. John's words come to mind.

Oblate website

I am delighted to share the link that will take you to our oblate website. Elba has put in an inordinate amount of time on this project and one we can show our appreciation of this is by using it and keeping it populated with current articles – where possible include accompanying photographs - so that any person checking it out leaves having gained a deeper appreciation of the love we share as Benedictine oblate of the World Community for Christian Meditation.

www.oblates.wccm.org/v2019/news-from-the-oblate-community/oblate-news/planningcommittee2021

Last, but by no means least, I am delighted to share with you plans to hold an Oblate Week Retreat at Bonnevaux, in the spring 2021. Dates Sunday 14th March to Sunday 21st March - 21st being the Feast of the Transitus of St. Benedict. Please mark this in your diaries!

“We are what we receive, and we are what we give. In our silent prayer we submit to God's creative power. God doesn't always choose those fit for His work, He fits those he chooses. And he chooses ordinary people like you and me, and then fits us for our task. In prayer God fits us for life, and sends us out from our prayer to say “yes” to life and to live it fully”..

(Elisabeth Holmgaard: “Be still and know that I am God” – Thoughts on prayer)

*With my love
Eileen*

Late news!

I received a message last evening telling me Shiriani Santiapilla has passed into eternal rest. May she rest in peace and rise in glory. Shiriani was one of our few remaining oblates who knew Fr John and she made her Final Oblation in Montreal. And here is the beauty of our community. I was just about to hit Save and send this article to Stefan for VV when I glanced at my phone and noticed a message had arrived from Mary Meyer, NOC for Paraguay: I paused what I was doing to open and read it. Mary was letting me know that last evening she received Nadia Burgos as a postulant. As the curtains closed on Shiriani's oblate journey they opened up for Nadia who began her journey as a meditator, with Mary's group, back in 2011. We hold them both in our prayers.

FROM STEFAN REYNOLDS

Editor of Via Vitae

Welcome to this edition of Via Vitae. I am grateful to all who have contributed and to the new designers of the Newsletter. I would like to draw your attention to a new resource for Oblates and for all those interested in the connection between meditation and the monastic tradition. Our own 'School of Meditation' program now runs an online course which is excellent. Written by Oblate Jim Green, the course consists of an introduction plus six lessons. Each lesson is in turn made up of six sections, entitled: READINESS, STABILITY, OBEDIENCE, HUMILITY, MODERATION, CONVERSION. I highly recommend it as a refresher and deepener of what it is to be a Benedictine Oblate connected to WCCM. It can be found at:

[www.theschoolofmeditation.org/
all-courses/benedictine_wisdom](http://www.theschoolofmeditation.org/all-courses/benedictine_wisdom)

Impressions of VISITING BONNEVAUX from New Zealand

by Nick and Linda Polaschek, Oblates



We were fortunate enough to be able to visit Bonnevaux recently for a couple of days in late May, en route to the annual retreat at Monte Oliveto. Here are brief impressions of our time there.



The Bonnevaux community has a core of half a dozen residents, and a number of others temporarily involved. Several, like Henriette, have been committed for many years to the WCCM house. Andrew, the manager, arrived two years ago, the rest have become involved with the Bonnevaux project in recent months, offering variable periods of voluntary service. There has been a great effort by residents since they arrived to make the aged chateau habitable and functional, reflecting their level of commitment to the place. Given its location in rural France, people living in the community for any length of time also need to become (minimally) bilingual. For many interested English speaking WCCM people this will be challenging.



We met Tomas, the young man who is developing an impressive organic garden at Bonnevaux which includes the orchard that the New Zealand community is contributing towards. An interesting joint venture. The WCCM is providing the land while Tomas provides the agricultural expertise and labour. The produce will both contribute towards feeding the community and also provide Tomas with an income. Tomas, who lived in Poitiers near Bonnevaux, was first told about the place by our former national coordinator Vincent while Tomas was living in New Zealand. There is potential for all kinds of ecological development on the large rural property in the future.



Community liturgies are held in a beautiful little chapel next to the chateau. There are five offices/meditation periods a day, starting at 6.30am. In some ways like being in a monastery, but the focus is on the work of meditation, with

only a skeletal Office, lacking any communally recited psalms ('the work of God' as is normal in the Benedictine tradition). Very positive from an ecumenical and interfaith perspective, but not obviously (to our oblate mind) very Benedictine. Perhaps a (radical) development in the tradition; it's difficult to balance both being open and also grounded. Several people we talked with (there and at the retreat) had been attracted by a Christian meditative practice, but had no interest in Catholic thinking or ritual. Andrew affirmed to us that the shared meditative silence is the engine that drives the community. A new form of Office for the WCCM community is currently under consideration, which may lead to a development in the current liturgy. While at Bonnevaux we



participated in a meditative Eucharist led by Laurence. Local French people attended, reflecting the engagement of the community with the people who live nearby. This was followed by a shared lunch featuring (unsurprisingly) delicious French food.

It has clearly been a real challenge to establish Bonnevaux while living in a building site, develop a daily community rhythm, set up the household and also cope with a stream of visitors. In the house two meals a day are taken in silence,

a traditional Benedictine practice derived from the Rule. For visitors this does not obviously reflect the welcome mandated in the Rule towards guests 'as to Christ', traditionally manifested in hospitality at the Abbot's table. Eventually most guests will eat elsewhere in the conference centre currently being developed in the old stables near the house. Even visiting as oblates it is not clear whether retaining this practice of silence at meals promotes a nascent community in a contemporary context. We participated in a community reflection led by Laurence on the Rule of Benedict, which are held three times a week. It was about idleness (as the enemy of the soul, a

typical theme in the Rule), clearly a distant memory at present for participants. The residents find the sessions to be a very positive developmental community activity.

All in all, one could describe progress to date as miraculous, in terms of things falling into place to enable Bonnevaux to happen, most especially in the people who have been attracted to make a commitment to live there, but also funding and special expertise needed to develop the place. The vision is great: the new centre in Bonnevaux will contribute to sharing Christian meditation across the world.

A Contemplative Ministry for and with LGBTQ Catholics

by Stefan Reynolds, Oblate Co-ordinator in Ireland



Argel Tuason, the Benedictine Oblate Coordinator for the Philippines, recently spoke as a panelist at the Fordham University in New York to share his journey and experience as a gay contemplative and activist working for welcome, affirmation and justice for LGBTQ Catholics. He co-founded the community Rainbow Catholics Philippines.

Held at the Lincoln Center Campus on June 26, 2019 and co-presented by the Fordham University Theology Department and the Church of Saint Francis Xavier, the event was entitled "LGBTQ+ Catholic Activism: A Global Conversation." The

conversation was moderated by Craig Ford, Ph.D, post-doctoral teaching fellow in Fordham's Department of Theology, and Jamie Manson, editor and writer for the National Catholic Reporter.

Argel shared with around 200 participants, mostly parishioners of the Church of Saint Francis Xavier, his spiritual journey to self-acceptance and affirmation as both gay and Catholic. He even found his Damascus -like encounter with the all-loving and gender-affirming God a very mystical experience so much so that if he is to write a book about his story he quipped that he would entitle it "Coming Out Within: A Gay Contemplative Experience."

A man and a woman, a couple, from the audience who happened to be contemplatives themselves, being practitioners of Centering Prayer, approached Argel during cocktails that followed the event and offered words of encouragement and support for the ministry he is doing for the Catholic Church. They also noticed his non-

bitterness towards the Church during his sharing of his experience of non-acceptance from some members of the Church. Argel admitted to them that there was a point in time when he thought of leaving the Church because of oppressive elements and judgmental attitude in its teaching about homosexuality. He attributed however his recovery from the Church's spiritual abuse to the healing and transformative effect of a contemplative practice coupled with the experience of being loved, accepted, affirmed and supported by his local meditation community as well as by the global community of WCCM, which is truly catholic. In the end, because of the couple's curiosity about Christian Meditation, Argel invited them to the monthly online Oblate Cell Meeting hosted by the Filipino community.



For more information about the said event at the Fordham University, you may read articles written about it using these links:

www.ncronline.org/news/people/activists-examine-church-impact-lgbtq-rights-movements-around-world

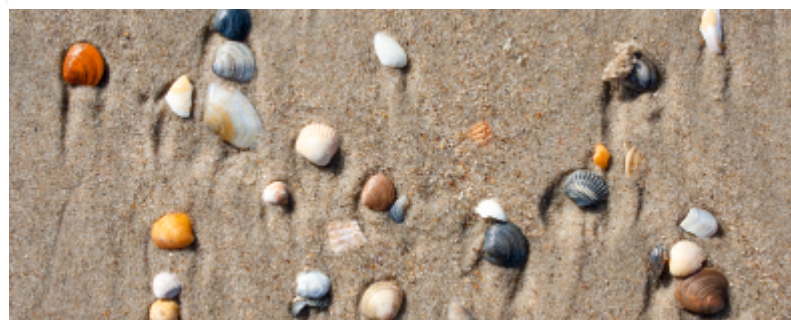
www.news.fordham.edu/university-news/in-moving-testimony-gay-catholics-reiterate-their-faith-in-the-church

Argel was also blessed to be given the opportunity to lead a workshop on Deepening Queer Spirituality and Theology in the recently concluded 3rd Assembly of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics (GNRC) held at the Cenacle Retreat House in Illinois, Chicago from June 30 to

July 4, 2019. The Global Network of Rainbow Catholics (GNRC) brings together groups and their members who work for pastoral care and justice for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people and their families. The Network works for the inclusion, dignity and equality of this community in the Roman Catholic Church and society. (See their website www.rainbowcatholics.org)

He was able to begin and end the sessions with contemplative silence such as practicing breath prayer. He was also able to introduce and let the participants experience the practice of Christian Meditation. Participants came from countries such as Slovakia, USA, Chile, Germany, Australia and the Philippines.

Little by little, it is becoming clearer to Argel the ministry God has been calling and preparing him to do. That is to offer to the wider Church community “the gift of his own being” as a homosexual and as being part of the LGBTQ movement around the world working for welcome, affirmation and justice for all. As the Synod Fathers mentioned: *“Homosexual persons have gifts and qualities that they can offer to Christian communities: are we capable of welcoming these people while guaranteeing them a fraternal space in our communities?”** And conversely, Argel would like to offer his contemplative experience, presence and practices to his fellow LGBTQ Catholics and activists.



Argel Tuason's talk **Coming Out Within: A Gay Contemplative Experience**

Fordham University, New York, June 26, 2019



I am a Benedictine Oblate of the Monastery without Walls, a lay and gay monastic living in the world. I also belong to the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics to which Rainbow Catholics Philippines, my local community, is affiliated with.

I am grateful to be here in what I feel as a sacred ground because this university has been made sacred by saints such as the late Fr John J McNeill who taught here at Fordham. His book *Taking A Chance on God* was an eye-opener and saved my soul, saved my life. For those who are not familiar with Fr John, “John J McNeill was an ordained priest and psychotherapist who was expelled from the Society of Jesus in 1987 for refusing to cease his ministry to gay men and lesbians. He taught philosophy and theology at Fordham University.” Fr John through his books was a spiritual friend during the time that I was still in search of my gay Catholic identity. I will tell more of my journey in a bit but for now let me thank you Fordham University in the persons of Dr Patrick Hornbeck, Chair of the Department of Theology, and Dr Robert Choiniere the one who coordinated with us as well as the Church of St Francis Xavier for putting up this event and for the invitation to be here in solidarity with my LGBTQ Catholic

brothers and sisters around the world. I am truly honored and grateful.

I hope to share with you this evening my experience as a gay Catholic in the Philippines and hopefully later in the facilitated conversation with Jamie and Craig, to give you glimpses of realities and experiences of LGBTQ Catholics in the Philippines.

I must say that I am relatively young and new in the LGBTQ movement and I must also say that the path that has opened up and I have taken so far is the path of contemplative and prophetic presence as gay and catholic. What it means I will share with you later. If I will name my experience as a gay catholic and write a book about it, I will entitle it as “*Coming Out Within: A Gay Contemplative Experience*.” Let me share with you my story:

I used to belong to a catholic community which in some ways is revolutionary when it comes to liturgical celebrations and creating a true sense of Catholic and Christian community among its members, but very conservative when it comes to adhering to the teachings of the church regarding sexuality and procreation. For example, I experienced going through some kind of “exorcism of the demon of homosexuality” by an Argentine catechist-priest in front of my brothers and sisters in the community in one of our intensive sessions.

Even though the community had given me a good and strong foundation in authentically living out the Catholic faith and a strong sense of community which I lacked in my own family when I was growing up as a teenager, I thank God for giving me the courage to confront and finally be true to myself and go through a process of

spiritual discernment as regards tensions between my sexuality and faith as a catholic.

I left that community in 2009 to find a way of still belonging to the Catholic church without rejecting my own sexuality, which is a very important part of who I am. It was not easy though to detach myself from the community I have grown and journeyed with for 7 years and to be on my own, spiritually. It felt like I was exiled. During that time, it felt like I was on an exile, on a desert, wandering from one community to another, searching and longing for a community I could call my own, a community who would accept me fully as I am. It was a period in my gay spiritual life when there was an intense longing to belong to a new community that I could call my own, a community who would accept me fully as I am unlike the conservative Catholic community I used to belong to.

To give you an idea of the search and longing for a new community I could call my own, a community who would accept me fully as I am, let me share with you a prayer of lamentation I wrote during that time of intense longing. I call this prayer "A Gay Catholic's Prayer" and I would like to pray and offer this prayer for and with my LGBTQ brothers and sisters around the world who are still searching and experiencing this longing for a community that would accept them fully as they are. And I pray, with my LGBTQ brothers and sisters, this prayer:

A Gay Catholic's Prayer

Lord,

I pray for people like me longing for a community, for people like me who lost their place in the church, rejected because of their sexuality.

You also know what it feels like to be

*rejected, don't you, Lord?
I pray for this invisible people of God,
my invisible community,
gay Catholics like me,
who are longing for a community,
for affirmation from fellow Catholics,
but displaced,
banished,
rejected,
despised,
hurting.*

*We are the invisible members of your
Body, O Lord,
of your church.*

*Unseen,
unheard,
unaccepted.*

I know

I am not alone.

*There are others like me,
Catholics like me,
out there.*

I pray for them.

*I pray for my brothers and sisters
as I pray for myself. I pray for them,
invisible as they are,*

*unseen,
unheard,
unaccepted,
hidden,
like me.*

*Longing for a community,
for affirmation
from others.*

*I pray for you,
my invisible community,
my hurting brothers and sisters.*

*I know you are there
though I cannot see you.*

I know

I am not alone.

*In God's time,
in God's will,
we'll see each other,
spend time together,
sharing stories,
holding hands
in love, prayer and worship,
without fear or shame,
"holy and righteous in your sight
all the days of our life."
We will break bread with each other,
dance as if there's no tomorrow,
encourage and affirm each other.
We who are
unseen,
unheard,
unaccepted,
invisible,
hidden.
Your Queendom come,
Your will be done.
Amongst us. Amen.*

I think this gathering is one concrete answer to that prayer, one concrete reality that I am not alone, that we are not alone, that the Queendom of God, through us and this gathering, is happening right now in our midst!

That is why I am now beginning to realize that my decision to stay within the "Roman" catholic church despite some members of the Roman hierarchy and teachings being judgmental and oppressive to gay or LBTQ catholics like me is a witness in itself, a prophetic witness. By my mere presence in the church, in a catholic community, as a gay catholic, is a statement, a witness in itself. More so, if I am contemplatively present with the rest of my brothers and sisters in the church. What I mean by "contemplatively present" is to be truly,

fully and authentically present as I am, with no shame or apologies for being who I am, fully accepting the gift of my own being. This is where my contemplative practices including meditation help me be fully and authentically present for and with others.

Mine has been a "ministry of presence" every time I am fully, truly, contemplatively present for and with my LGBTQ brothers and sisters, especially those who are in need of my attentive presence.

Every time I am really present for and with my 90 years old prayer partner best friend for ten years especially during the times he feels alone and neglected because of his age, I feel like receiving and sharing "the real presence" of Christ from and with him. And this is how I have learned to see the essence of the Eucharist: When I share the presence of Christ truly and fully with others.

Every time I am truly and really present for and with my friends who are living with HIV and dealing with addiction, I am experiencing and sharing the real presence of Christ.

And this is what I think is the essence of being truly catholic:

Being truly and fully embracing of myself as I am, including my sexuality, and as a fruit of this true self-love and acceptance, I become truly and fully embracing and accepting of others no matter the perceived differences. As the maxim goes: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, diversity."

Argel Tuason

Swallow's Heart

A Reflection by Liane Alves

Bliss. Lightness. Flight.

These words represent what I feel as I complete my path as Oblate in the World Community for Christian Meditation. On this warm Saturday of April 2019, we are in the Church of the Seminary of St. Alphonsus, in Aparecida, São Paulo, in front of the 200 participants of the retreat that Father Laurence Freeman usually gives annually in Brazil. At my side, at the altar, he talks about this moment which, for me, is crucial.



That's when a flock of six or seven swallows come in from the side door of the church. Flying in large circles, they play between the benches and the altar in a celebration of pure joy.



For seconds, we were speechless in front of that unexpected dance. They land on the top of a column in the back of the temple. For him, they represent the symbol of the World Community for Christian Meditation: the two birds at the edge of a fountain or a cup, symbols of active life alongside the contemplative life. Another pair of birds nestles on top of the main nave's arch. And the singular vision of birds repeats the poetic image of Psalm 84: in it, the psalmist says that his heart yearns to dwell in God as do the swallows that build nests on the altar.

For sailors, the sight of the swallows meant a return to the home and the proximity of a safe harbor. Many of them bring the image of these tattooed birds to the chest.

In ancestral cultures, such as Egyptian, Chinese or Greek, swallows symbolize the Resurrection, for they announce the warmth and life that blossoms again in the fields, for they come with Spring. Because of this, they are also associated with Fire, Light and Hope. They also represent Love, Union and Fidelity, because they are monogamous birds: Legends say that swallows always return to the same nest they have built together. They are also symbols of community, for they fly in flocks and, for Native Americans, signal the beginning of a Spiritual Journey. For these peoples, swallows can reveal to the good pilgrim where the Doors of Heaven stand, for they keep this secret.

The people in the seats turned their heads in all directions, between smiles, to accompany the flight of the birds. And the ceremony in which the five Oblates of the World Community for Christian Meditation will consecrate themselves to God continues under the gaze and companionship of the birds.

It is the solemn moment of our signing that we commit ourselves to renew our baptismal promises as disciples of God, renounce illusion and sin, and dedicate ourselves to the construction of the human family in love and peace. Father Laurence asks a few words for us. And they sprout out of my heart. And I tell you that there was the girl who felt compassion for the first time seeing Jesus died on the cross in the chapel of his college; the young woman who wrote about many spiritual traditions, but with Jesus alive in the heart like an ardent ember; the woman who embraced Buddhism and who found wisdom there, yes, but not the fire of the Spirit; and the mature woman who returned to her first Love, Jesus, after making a complete spiritual circle in her life.

I thanked the Angels, and Mary, their Queen, who marked our return, my and my husband's, to Christianity (in addition to all the works indicated for reading during our journey as Oblates, the book Dialogues with the Angel was very important for us). And I thanked Father Laurence, with whom I have a great connection from the time I interviewed him as a journalist.

Antonio, my husband, was also applying for the Oblate at that ceremony and is there at my side. We were exultant. And each of us five (Maurício, Ana Cristina, Luís, Antonio and me) speaks what they feel with living words. And I realized in silence how the meditation we practiced left us



extraordinarily present to everything that happened. In the final blessing of the oblation, Dom Laurence asks that God continue the work begun in our hearts.

After the ceremony, we returned to our seats in the first pews of the church. The girl next to me places a rosary in my hands and begs me to smile. It's a spontaneous gift from her, I do not even know her. The third is made of red porous beads with the shape and scent of roses. I carefully observe the medal of the third, since I am from Santa Teresinha. The Thérèse of Lisieux, so present in my childhood (the seat of the college where I studied is from there) also was symbolically there.



The mass continues until the moment of the Eucharist arrives. There is deep silence. The swallows withdrew at some point, but I do not know when. They were no longer there. Only Jesus Christ was alive in those many hearts.

And already at home, the following day, I receive from a dear friend on the internet the image that illustrates this article: glass swallows carved in a crystal vase signed by René LaliAgain, synchronicity ... My gaze lingers on the central figure. And I see how swallows, by the delicate hands of an artist, can become remarkably like angels.

In Brazil, we live immersed in a cheerful, colorful, exteriorized visual culture. Perhaps that is why the symbols are so openly manifested to us. But I am sure that the Spirit can be perceived in other cultures: perhaps through a gentle breeze, through a silence of another quality, meaningful dreams or an inspiration from the heart that can determine a complete change of life. However, it does not matter whether they are implicit or explicit. The truth is that in these rare moments when we feel so close to the sacred it is possible to feel the Divine Presence that is manifested among us.

We have just to be aware.

You pronounced my name

How is life consecrated to God?

It is something that always starts from an internal decision, a call that is heard in the deepest soul.

"Lord, you looked into my eyes, smiling, you pronounced my name," says the song.

And it is so: a personal call, unquestionable, that can manifest itself in various ways.

And the way of oblation is one of them.

The word oblatio comes from Latin, and means offering, giving, gift. It is an act that can become sacred in a ceremony that ends with its signature on the altar of a church or the chapel of a monastery. From that moment on, your heart, your hands and your soul are given to God. And you become consecrated. We become a new man and a new woman.

It is a testimony of deep love. A constant abdication of your personal will. A delivery that makes the phrase of the Our Father's prayer real, concrete and vivid: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

What is it to consecrate life to God? The path of oblation is one of these paths: the layman continues his normal life, but becomes an integral part of a spiritual community attached to a monastery.

Becoming an Oblate is part of the Christian monastic tradition. Among the Benedictine monasteries is a very present possibility. In assuming the oblation, the layman undertakes to read and to follow every day the Rule of St Benedict, a small book written 1500 years ago by an abbot and saint, Benedict of Nursia. The Rule is a manual of a profound internal transformation, always in the contradiction of the ego, and in the direction of love, stability, obedience and the conversion of customs centered in the "I".

In order to become an Oblate it is not necessary to become a monk. His civil life remains exactly the same: Oblates can be single or married, have children and a family. They continue as professionals in the job market, going to malls, restaurants and the cinema. But their priority of life is surrender to God, through prayer, meditation and service. And they do so with joy: some of the characteristics of the Oblates, as well as that of the monks who have offered their hearts completely, is the presence of a feeling of peace, a light and open serenity. Of course, we are also run over by anger, fear or bad mood. But we are committed to moving away from negative feelings as soon as possible by the vote of stability.

Oblates are always ready to fulfill what the monastery or community needs. And this is not seen as work, but rather as the externalization of his love for God in the form of the offering of his talents, with humility and joy. I believe, however, that the main donation to be made in the oblation

is the "giving of oneself", of our rigidities and intolerances, manias and exclusions, weights, fears and instabilities. A good, and difficult, combat.

This year, after the ceremony, 18 new candidates to Oblates were nominated. They will begin as postulants to the oblature, after a year they will

How to (not) organize an Oblates' retreat

by Liane Alves, Oblate from Brazil

It was a challenge: to organize at my own home in Campos do Jordão the first Brazilian Oblates' retreat. Days before accepting it, I'd promised myself not to face such task. I've already experiences in organizing events and I knew very well that I would probably wake up in the mid of the night with metaphysical questions like "Oh, my God, I didn't ask if somebody is vegetarian or allergic to shrimps!", after I have choose shrimps with pasta for lunch, or "I don't have pillows for everybody!" after counting them in my mind at 3 o'clock at night. No, no, I'd prefer to be only Mary, not Martha. I will happily select the texts to be read, the places nearby where we could walk but for the rest I'd prefer to do my three times meditation's practices in tranquility. During all my life I was a Mary trying very hard to be Martha as a mother of two children and a journalist



reach the novices, and after a year again, the Oblates. Like us. The girl who gave me the rosary is among them. She just told me that her spiritual life was similar to mine. It's an extraordinary number, amazing. Tainã Bonifacio, our dear young coordinator, is going to have a lot of work.

Now, with a little more help.



specialized in, paradoxically, quality of life and spirituality. Like many of us that have a contemplative side, I thought that in my retirement I have the right to be only Mary, now would be the best part of all.

Well, as you can imagine, faced with the possibility of not having any retreat, because noone at that moment has the conditions that I had (a house in a calm place full of nature at the mountains), I decided to accept the challenge. It was only six or seven people, anyway. And I promised to get inspired by Sister Maria de Fátima, a Benedictine's nun of the nearby Saint John's Monastery where my husband and me coordinate a group of Christian Meditation. She organizes the practical side and the spiritual content of the Monastery's Oblates retreats with a smiling face, a centred voice and a astonishing sense of humility. She is Mary and Martha at the same time. And this would be my true challenge.

It was a good idea to have this inspiration. Sometimes it really worked, sometimes it didn't, as life itself, but to have this reference in mind helped me a lot. When I was submerged doing the mis en place of a pears, gorgonzola, walnut and cress salad, something waked me up to practice mindfulness at the same time; when I felt myself to much agitated, I did the meditation practice during the day and while I was choosing a John's Main or a Father Laurence text, I really reflected

about what I was reading.

I was very surprised that I had time to do all these things without be in panic. It was like when I water my geranium's flower boxes: I can do it mechanically, thinking in other things and not paying attention in what I'm doing, or I can do this with love and care of the flowers, enjoying each moment and feeling happiness and gratitude for the experience.

Sharing My Final Oblation

by Jm Rebueno

Thy Will Be Done!

There's a dramatic difference in an adolescent's declaration of love and that of an adult nearing end of life.

Lao Tzu wrote *"being loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage."* How else could it be?



Some oblates present in the ceremony: (l-r) Fred & Magdalena Jass (Canada), Anita Finnegan (UK), Paul Dunn (USA), Pat Hay (UK).

February 20, 2019, I made my declaration of love with the WCCM Oblate Community as an adult who have had a full life running the gamut from

innocence to willful disobedience to God's will beyond biting into Eve's apple. I have made a similar declaration half a century ago as a silly adolescent facing possible death under the crushing torrents of an angry waterfall. Then, in the loudest silent cry I ever made, I surrendered the last seconds of my life to Him "Thy will be done!" On hindsight, it was a cry for God's mercy – to forgive me out of His Love for all my silliness. It certainly gave me strength to accept the inevitable. As an adult choosing to love God requires steel courage: to refuse giving in to my needy self yet at the same time to have compassion for the Eve's that muddle my choices and action to love God. This is the constant challenge I am happy to take. I pray that being true to my oblation will give me the inner strength to respond accordingly.

By some coincidence two events meaningfully prepared me for my final oblation. The two renewal of vows we pilgrims made during the Contemplative Journey in Holy Land with Father Laurence.

In Cana, I witnessed nine couples married from

two to almost 60 years teary eyed renewing their vows to each other! It felt like I, too, was being asked into some kind of marriage that required changing my mental set: that soon it is no longer I alone that lives – beholden to no one. This time, each step I take must be approached such that the best interest of my Oblate community as channels of Love is forwarded. Then, I, too, was teary eyed basking in the joy of the couples and at the same time teary eyed at the thought of letting go my individualistic willful self. I had to shake my tears. I have been working for two years to become an oblate. I won't allow my doubts to pass this opportunity.

The other vow was one I made at the Jordan River rejecting Satan, his works, his empty promises and resolutely affirming my belief in and faithfulness to the Triune God! Garbed in a white tunic, bent low, water from the River poured on my head, while exteriorly symbolical, I felt it cleansed me of my sins while the grace of all the faithful present filled me with strength! I felt ready.

In the subterranean Chapel of the Apostles beneath the Garden of Gethsemane before my abbot Fr. Laurence Freeman, OSB and the community of oblates and pilgrims participating

in the Contemplative Journey in Holy Land, I made my final oblation. I had twice the blessing to repeat privately my final oblation on the rock that received Jesus' sweat of blood as He declared His ultimate expression of Love for the Father with “Thy will be done!” Happy and deeply grateful to all those who helped me make this oblation with special mention to Angela Gregson (my mentor), Ella Sanchez (providing me the grace to make my oblation in Holy Land), Mitos Santisteban (national coordinator-Philippines), and Lars Aggerbeck and Chinggay Jayme (for documenting this personal milestone).



Fr. Laurence welcoming me to the Community with three other priests in attendance: (l-r) Fr. Tom Villafranca (Philippines; fractionally shown), Fr. Kevin Maksym (USA) and Fr. Martin Tobin, CSsR (Philippines).



UK Annual Oblate Retreat, Turvey Abbey, November 2019
by Gilly Withers, UK Oblate



The weekend had a very special feel about it with much joy, trust and hope coming from Laurence's uplifting talk. Although he only joined us by video link from Bonnevaux, it was nearly as good as his being with us in person. We managed to rig up a system whereby he could see us and talk to us and we could hear him. Once we managed to control the War of the Worlds feedback sounds, it worked our very well.

Dear Brother Herbert who is now 98 years old joined us for a bit and Brother John led our Lectio and celebrated the Eucharist with us. There were two people making their final oblation, one person transferring as a novice from another Benedictine monastery and three new postulants from the UK, one of whom is an Anglican priest. Anne Katrine from Denmark also became a postulant.

Xiao Xiao shared with us about the amazing growth of Christian meditation in China and asked us for our prayers. Such amazing blessings!

The Cambridge cell organized the activities which were a Lectio on poetry, colouring in mandalas and sharing quietly with Pam while she spun wool on her spinning wheel. This was a bit different and we found it both enlightening and calming.



Heart's Hearth - A Christmas Poem

by Stefan Reynolds, Oblate in Ireland

Something tells me that tonight you are welcoming our hearts back home.
We come in tired, and you prepare for us the homeland we never knew.
“Welcome in!” you say, “There are no strangers here, even the wind has a bed and a meal.
Take off your shoes. You have been through quite an ordeal. Rest your feet.”
And the rain taps upon the window, and says, “Me too, I have been upon the street.
They close the doors, they shutter the pane, for nobody wants the winds and the rain.”
“But,” you say fondly, “the heart finds a home among the waifs and the stray.
The Lord of all, on Christmas Day, was born in a stable, born in a cave.
The place was open; and shepherd and king, donkey and ox came wandering in.
Even the stars shone all around the little manger on the stable ground.
So, no need for ceiling, no need for walls, when the wind blows and the rain falls.
For there's a little fire that burns in the heart, it warms all about and keeps nothing out.”

Poems

by Wally Saunders. Oblate in USA

Translucency

To obscure a glass

a mirror makes
all I see is me
mired in mirrored
fantasy
but cleanse the glass
remove the fake
I get to glimpse

Reality.

The dross and trivia all about
distract me scatter splatter me,
into stumbling, crumbling, bumbling
absurd obscurity.

With quiet time mantra mine
I focus on the now
I leave the past behind
future cease to mind

come to clarity.

I see through glass
beyond the asinine, the crass,
lighten up
no longer lost at sea
I see the me that's Thee
I see the Thee that's me.

Mollification

Munificent mollifying mantra

melts
my stoic stony heart
heals my sightless eyes.
New light reveals shadows, textures, shades,
no longer black or white,
fight or flight.
I learn to chill,

To flow surrender be,

when storm-beset,
grow sea legs under me,
behold
learn from
magnificent motionless-winged
breeze-borne gulls
recall hard-shelled seeds dissolution death-
met
become

Dylan's green fused Power-driven
flower tower
or Redwood tree.

Sam Gamalatge (Perth, Western Australia), Oblate of the WCCM – an Obituary
by John Coleman

It is with respectful sadness that the World Community of Christian Meditation Australia (WA) Inc. inform the wider Oblate community (WCCM) of the recent death of their member, Sam Gamalatge.

Sam had been an Oblate of WCCM since 1999. Sam, along with his wife, Vesta guided the Western Australian Christian Meditation community from approximately 1986 – 2007. What a wonderful gift they offered to this somewhat isolated and far-flung region of our world.

Initially, Vesta and Caroline Edwards (nee Crosby), received sponsorship from the Catholic Archdiocese of Perth to spend time with the newish Montreal Priory (Canada) community, led by Fr. Laurence Freeman OSB, following the death of John Main OSB in 1982. Sam, too, made the journey. Sam and Vesta returned to Perth and immediately set to work and outreached the gift of Christian Meditation. Along with the likes of Rev. Brian and Patricia Stitt (WA) they assisted in establishing a strong base from which Christian Meditation has been able to flourish. During this early period Sam ran the bookshop for the emerging national Christian Meditation Community, sending books all over Australia in response to demand. Sam and Vesta were amongst

the first Australian participants of the international School of Christian Meditation led by Fr Laurence which was held in Florence in 1997.

Sam had been challenged by serious health concerns over the last number of years. Sam's requiem Mass was celebrated by Fra. Christopher Ross (Servite) on 15th June 2019. Fra. Christopher was not only instrumental in offering spiritual guidance to the work that Sam and Vesta had begun in those early days; but for many years the Servite community (Tuart Hill, WA) offered their centre from which Western Australian groups operated.

**A Eucharistic Celebration
for the life of**

SAM GAMALATGE

23 January 1926 -
8 June 2019

Celebrant:
Fra Christopher
Ross OSM



Sylvia Howell (UK), Oblate of the WCCM – an Obituary
by Stefan Reynolds, Oblate in Ireland

In 2001 Sylvia started a regular weekly Christian Meditation group in Barnes, SW London, where I was lucky to be able to attend. The group has been going for 16 years now, and continues to be run by her husband John, with whom she shared a dedication to meditation as a practice. Sylvia was married to John for 55 years. They were a wonderful example of a couple who shared meditation, and were regularly at the UK National Conferences. It was after one of the group meetings that Sylvia talked to me about becoming an Oblate and I had the privilege of being her Oblate mentor over the next two years. I became good friends of Sylvia and her husband John and rented for some years the flat at the top of their house. They were very pleasant landlords and made me feel quite at home while I was doing my PhD. Sylvia made her Final Oblation during the Mass celebrated by Laurence for UK Oblate Day, in December 2009.

In her professional life Sylvia trained and qualified as a Counsellor to help those suffering bereavement, addictions and relationship problems, volunteering with Cruse in Richmond, MIND and Ealing Abbey, meeting and helping people from all walks of life. After the 7/7 bombings in 2005 she went up with CRUSE to help the victims, organised by the Red Cross. Her concern for those bereaved was a response to her own childhood experiences, she was a Child Prisoner of War (for 3 years) under the Japanese, where she suffered starvation and inhumanity, witnessing fear and death. As her son David Howell said in his funeral address, “She experienced more by the age of 11 than many had in a lifetime. Having survived (either in spite of it or because of it) she gave her life to helping others. She came from a place of spirituality, where she could see good in everything and in everyone.



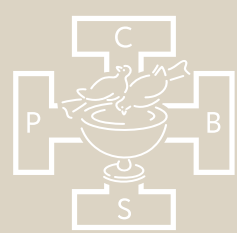
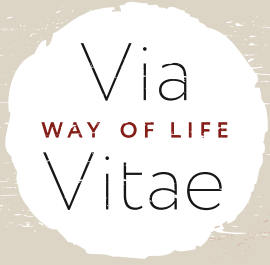
God was at the heart of All. She reinforced this through meditation... She followed the course of forgiveness and reconciliation and was inspired by the examples of the desert fathers and mothers.”

Her monastic Oblation was very important for Sylvia. She was a regular member of Cockfosters Oblate cell and attended the Oblate meetings at the house in Ealing. She had to struggle with health issues throughout her life, in the later years, cancer and Pulmonary Hypertension, which in the end proved fatal. She prepared for death, as David her son told us, “Mum accepted that gift of life: she also accepted that life would end, and death would come: she described it as: “laying back into Gods arms.” As a friend Christabel Gairdner

recounted also at the funeral, “in what was to be my last visit to her in hospital Sylvia said, 'I have never been frightened of dying. All my life I have felt God to be very near.'” She died on 28th March, 2019 and was buried on 30th April. May she rest in peace, she will be much missed; a quiet but brave woman who brought consolation and inspiration to many in her life. To me I will always remember the hospitality her and John gave me making of their home a little model of Benedictine welcome.

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