

Benedictine Oblates of
The World Community for
Christian Meditation

Meditation is a way to this stability, the stability that is the reality of our own being. Saying the mantra is like dropping the anchor, anchoring yourself in the depths of your own being.

Real stability for each of us can only come when we are firmly anchored in God. The extraordinary discovery for us to make is that once we are anchored in our true selves, we are anchored in God.

John Main

The Hunger for Depth
and Meaning

The World
Community
for Christian
Meditation



From Fr Laurence's introductory page to the new website "A Contemplative Path through the Crisis"

Meditation will not instantly solve all problems. But it changes how we view and deal with the challenges we face. It helps us to 'set our troubled minds at rest' and to find the authentic, interior peace that stabilises us when we are in turmoil. For many who have a spiritual path and practice, this crisis is a call to deepen it. The immediate need is to reduce fear and anxiety and – even in a time of social isolation – to discover a



sense of connection with others [...] Each of us can build an inclusive contemplative response that makes a difference to everyone around us even when we are physically separated. Social distancing can bring us closer together spiritually. But we need to go deeper. To go deeper we need to be still. Meditation does both.



Following such a path also means becoming more other-centred, turned practically towards the relief of others' suffering. This is to be, in a Christlike way, what every contemplative path aims to be: 'medicine, physician and nurse to those in need'. We need to get through the crisis but also to see the opportunities it offers. With a path, we can better see how to be ready to play our part after the crisis. A contemplative path commits us all not only to survival, but to a better human flourishing.

Welcome to A Contemplative Path.

Laurence



OBEDIENCE

Notes from Fr Laurence’s Talk for
‘Meditation Amidst Pandemic’

Monday 18th May 2020

collated by Angela Greenwood, UK Oblate

As oblates, obedience is one of our precepts or vows along with stability and conversion. It is very important in time of crisis that obedience is either gently or strongly enforced and, in daily life, in every kind of society, it is necessary that enforcement or punishment is in accord with the degree of the offense. All civilized societies recognize that people are sinful at times and this has to be dealt with. St Benedict recognized obedience at this practical level. He says that where obedience has not been shown, the Abbot must gather the community, listen, and then balance all the views on the matter. This is the vertical level. The Abbot has to recognize this accountability to others, we all have to respect the rules of the game. Then in Chapter 71 of the Rule, Benedict comes to the spiritual level, the horizontal level. At the end of his life, Benedict distilled his experience into the beautiful final teaching - by obeying each other the monks will go to God. He is saying this is a direct spiritual path and leads in the end to the mystical level. Jesus was obedient even unto death. He was not just running an organization.

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The younger members of the community must respect their seniors out of love not out of fear. Obedience comes out of love. If someone in the community is quarrelsome they need to be corrected. In Chapter 71 Benedict is very concerned about reconciliation – we need to be rebalancing constantly. Living with others gives us self-knowledge. Even if we are on our own we need a sense of community in order to move from loneliness to solitude. When the atmosphere in community is disrupted reconciliation needs to be achieved. Those involved should seek to be reconciled immediately on practical and spiritual levels. If someone cannot be obedient to others in the community, they must leave. This was a rare and painful happening for Benedict, as it is for us, and is the very last resort. Benedict says that the monks should compete with each other in being kinder and more patient with each other. Patience is related to suffering. We have to go through anger and resentment, put the other person first, prefer nothing to Christ, to an experience of Christ working in us and bringing us to God. This is the third level, the mystical level. Simone Weil understood this profoundly. She was a great mind, a philosopher and a great mystic.



Attention is obedience to what is. We are all tempted by fantasy, the unreal, fears, the illusory realm. The only thing that is real is now, obedience to what is. It is a necessity. This virus has to be accepted. We renounce the 'I', the ego, and go to the other side. By paying attention we practice obedience, and the fruit is that we become more accepting of reality, more connected. To be disobedient is to become distracted. In meditation it opens up the connection between community and society. The world, more than ever, needs contemplatives to awaken, to open up through a grass root transformation - wisdom comes through the Holy Spirit rising through all of us.

LETTER FROM EILEEN DUTT

International Oblate Co-Ordinator



"These strange days of isolation allow plenty of time to smell the roses; but alas poor roses, they don't like this wind and rain and are keeping their sweet fragrance to themselves. People

who meditate often do the same - keep it to themselves - but that is not my way. The time is always right to try meditation, even for the first time. We all have to start somewhere and 2.00pm every Friday is an opportunity - if today is the day." Pam Austin: UK Postulant

For some time Pam has been thinking about leading an online group; I know because I am her mentor. Pam is a gifted spinner and she runs her own spinning school including organised weekend workshops at Launde Abbey, a Christian Retreat House and Conference Centre under the stewardship of the Church of England. Since beginning her oblate journey proper – I say 'proper' because her dear husband was a

Benedictine Oblate. Although Pam often accompanied him when he visited his monastic community she never felt her call was to the same community so she waited knowing that when her call did come she would recognise it. It came in 2017 when she joined oblates at Monastery of Christ our Saviour, Turvey. During the course of that day Pam knew she found what she had always been searching for; a community where she truly felt at home! May all seekers be similarly open to listening to the voice that speaks beyond words. Pam has always wanted to facilitate a meditation group so I was not surprised when she came forward not long into lockdown. She had begun to offer groups for her spinners – by way of keeping in touch with them and offering support – but her deeper call was to share with them, and others, the gift of meditation.

Guided by Julia Williamson, Oblate and member of UK oblate Council – also online coordinator – and using 'Your Daily Practice' for her talks, Pam now leads a weekly group and to her joy some of her 'spinners' faithfully attend, every week.

I offer Pam's story as an example of the way Oblates have been getting more deeply involved in supporting the work of World Community for Christian Meditation during this difficult time. The weekly Meditation Through Pandemic times of prayer and meditation including a talk by Fr. Laurence, or a teacher from the School of Meditation - Kim's talk was very special as one would expect when she is, and I quote Fr. Laurence, "one of our most profound, and accessible, teachers in the community." Other initiatives include 'At Home' national oblate retreats; leading online courses; facilitating extra online sessions and participating in events on A Contemplative Path Through Crisis website – many oblates also join with the resident community at Bonnevaux each Sunday for Contemplative Masses celebrated by Fr. Laurence. Very special!

During the lockdown my own meetings have increased exponentially so much so in fact that Alan, my husband, has taken to asking me, “and which continent are you ‘zoom-ing’ off to, today?” Yes, it has been a busy time, but it has also been a spiritually enriching time. I also know that through my additional conversations with NOC (National Oblate Communities) that I will be coming out of the pandemic more informed of the needs, and the expectations, of NOC’s and certainly more appreciative of the diversity of our global community and the deep generosity of spirit of Oblates. I realise I have only given here a small snap-shot view of the ways Oblates have responded to the unexpected challenges and uncertainties of the pandemic there have been others and we are deeply grateful to you all. Together, we have, and I quote John Main: ‘been sharing the vision of the great spirit of St Benedict who points beyond himself to God. His message to us is support one another, encourage one another and in this fraternity of encouragement and support find Christ in one another. And having found him, proclaim him to all the world.’ (Community of Love p. 168)



EDITORIAL

by Stefan Reynolds

Many thanks to all who have contributed to this newsletter. The last months have been for many a hard time of uncertainty, however, I know many if not all of us have appreciated our meditation practice and the support of faith community online more than ever. It has been a time of growing connection also between our Oblate Community stretched as it is around the world. The situation has made us realise that we are really united globally - contemplatives in community in the midst of the world. We have been keeping each other and all those suffering at this time close to our hearts as we meditate. Specific member of the community come to mind - Giovanni Foffano, NOC for Italian Oblates suffered a heart attack but happily now is recovered. Albert and Maria Zakharova, NOCs for Oblates in Poland and Ukraine had Covid19 but are thankfully well. Their help as Graphic Designers for this newsletter is greatly appreciated. Margaret Comerford, an Oblate from the UK was in hospital for a week on Oxygen but is now well. I am sure there are many others who have been affected and whom you are praying for locally. Whole countries have been put under very testing financial situations as well. We hear something about this in Argel Tuason’s article in this newsletter. We remember all those who are living now with a much reduced income and for countries that are still in situations of high health risks, USA and now Brazil and India come particularly to mind. WCCM has Oblates in all countries so we are all connected. I hope this Newsletter will show that mutual concern.



There has been many good things happening as well in the community. Eileen has spoken about

the Online Meditation in a Time of Pandemic. There have also been national gatherings of Oblates online, some like that of the Filipino community have been open to all. There is also an expansion of new Oblates in New Zealand, which you can read about below in the News. There is also the wonderful online resource:

acontemplativepath-wccm.org

We also celebrated recently the 40th Anniversary of Fr. Laurence's ordination. He was ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Crowley in the chapel of the mother house of the Congregation de Notre Dame in Montreal on June 8th 1980. His journey can be traced in "Monastery Without Walls" where John Main speaks of the support Fr Laurence was to him, and to the whole development of the community and work of Christian Meditation.



Time Line of Fr. Laurence OSB's Monastic and Priestly Journey in the words of John Main (Source: "Monastery Without Walls")



THE CALL TO MOVE ON (pg.11)

Word of the Meditation center at Ealing was spreading widely, through personal contact and our first publications. By a peculiar series of connections, it reached Montreal and led to an invitation from its archbishop to make a monastic foundation there [...] At the beginning of 1977, the community bravely accepted his proposal for a

two-year trial period [...] Brother Laurence Freeman, who had joined the monastery after six months in the lay community was in simple vows and had started his theological studies, also volunteered to come.

MINOR ORDERS (pg.99)

At the end of August 1978 Laurence Freeman was about to make his solemn monastic profession at Mount Saviour Abbey in New York. He had been ordained to minor orders, the first step towards ordination to the priesthood, in early September. Bishop Crowley had come to us at Vendome for compline and meditation and bestowed the orders at a ceremony in which several of our friends participated. It also fell to Brother Laurence to greet our former abbot, Francis Rossiter, from Ealing, who came from England to attend the profession and meet our new brethren at Mount

Saviour. Bishop Crowley also participated in the ceremony and led a group of our friends from Montreal down to Elmira, New York.

SOLEMN MONASTIC PROFESSION (pg.100)

Dom Laurence made his Solemn Profession at Mount Saviour Monastery in New York State on October 18th 1979 Prior Martin Boler received his vows and presided at the Mass of his Profession. Bishop Crowley of Montreal concelebrated at the Mass along with our former abbot, Dom Francis Rossiter who came over from Ealing to be present at this first Solemn Profession for our community. Several members of the community and friends from Montreal also travelled to Mount Saviour to share in the occasion.



Mount Saviour Monastery

ORDINATION TO THE DIACONATE

(pg.106/7)

In December 1979, Laurence Freeman was ordained to the diaconate by Bishop Crowley at a ceremony where about 200 friends of the community helped make it a prayerful and symbolic moment in the history of our community.

ORDINATION TO THE PRIESTHOOD

(pg.130)

There are days in our lives, days of epiphany, when the unfolding revelation takes on a wholly incarnate form and the plan of the mystery is made

visible. On such days what seems the toil and labour of the pilgrimage gives way to “enfleshed” grace. The center of the pattern dilates and touches us with a sureness beyond the power of any pattern of words or experience to contain. Such a day for our Community was June 8th 1980, the Feast of Corpus Christi, the Body of Christ, when Laurence Freeman was ordained to the sacred priesthood.

I know all of us have benefited so much from Fr. Laurence’s ministry and as Oblates we send our gratitude and assure him that he is much loved.

I hope you enjoy this Newsletter, and do pass it on to anyone you think may be interested in the Benedictine Oblate life. Keep well, keep safe, keep on the way and keep on, whatever way you do, sharing the pearl of great price that we have been given – our way of prayer and faith which helps us grow in love for all.

God bless, from Stefan



ARTICLES

Sharing The Gift of Meditation to People on the Margins

by Terry Doyle, UK Oblate

Just three months ago in late February, though what seems like another world away now (!), I was able to facilitate a Wellbeing Retreat for 25 Asylum Seekers who use the Methodist Asylum Project MAP in Middlesbrough and Redcar, and is managed by Ailsa Adamson who is a committed meditator within our tradition. The retreat was held at the beautiful Benedictine Monastery at Ampleforth in North Yorkshire, UK.



The two days away proved to be a profoundly healing and beneficial time for all involved, and indeed very humbling for me to be able to introduce the gifts of our meditation practice to such lovely but deeply wounded people. Indeed, one of the hesitations from many of the group was to negotiate what traumatic memories might be lurking in the dark recesses of their minds that are normally avoided by any form of so called distraction therapy.

Another slight complication was the mix between Christian and Muslim in the group making our Mantra Maranatha not the most obvious choice for the Muslims amongst us.

As always in these kinds of situations where I feel that I'm not in control, I hand myself over to be used as a channel for the Holy Spirit to work through me, to guide me in my words and actions, and to be a healing balm for whatever might come up.

Given some of the group were struggling to feel relaxed enough in themselves to commence the inner work, some had even asked in our introductions if they could leave their eyes open when we would be meditating, we started proceedings with a hearty lunch and a small tour of the Abbey and Visitor Centre to help bed us all in. And besides, we all know that it's difficult to focus on the Spirit if our bellies are empty and most of the group wouldn't have had much of a breakfast at home if anything at all.

After lunch we had fun playing table tennis and pool before all doing some Tai Chi to help relax and soften the body, mostly locked in tensions and tightness through years of struggle and hardships most of us cannot even imagine.

More group sharing in a circle helped to bond us as a group and a session of "energy psychology" by way of EFT Emotional Freedom Technique, further served to build the necessary trust and confidence to begin the process of being willing enough to drop our defenses just a little bit so we



could tentatively enter the healing waters to be found in the silence and stillness of meditation.

Some used Maranatha to focus the mind, others liked the phrase, "I am safe, relax, all is well".

What happened in the first meditation period was so deeply beautiful it brought tears to my eyes.

Clearly the Holy Spirit was with us, gently guiding and reassuring us home to ourselves and into what can only be described as a Holy Encounter. One of the young men from Iran had been particularly troubled before the trip and indeed had an important meeting coming up when he got back to Middlesbrough with a Government Official that was greatly troubling him. He was very fearful to the point where his body was shaking but he listened to my words and stayed with the process until he felt able to let go and start to relax for the first time in years. Ailsa recorded his words as follows :

"I cannot believe the meditation session, you have no idea what it is like inside my mind. I get no quiet, ever, and nothing stops it. My mind is so bad, I am dying in there. Then we meditated and it was, ohhh, I can feel the peace coming into my body. I had no idea this could ever happen for me". In plenary "I had such problem because I cannot relax. In the meditation session, I could feel energy around me, All of a sudden, my hand jumped similar to a shock, and my body was coming from tight, tight, tight, to loose".

Now you know why I was so tearful by now, the atmosphere in the room was just so peaceful and "Holy", a Sacred Space wherein the Spirit could begin the process of healing and harmony so needed by the hearts of minds of the group.

More food, games, music and laughter in between our other healing sessions and an excellent session on the Benedictine 12 Steps of Humility from Fr.

Christopher (who never has experienced such honest and direct questions afterwards!) before the bus arrived to take us home to a much starker reality but now empowered with having been initiated into the gentle healing art of our Communities Meditation and all the nurturing that must surely ensue for those that embrace the discipline of the regular practice.



Outreach of **meditatio**
The World Community for Christian Meditation

And indeed the process can now continue through the help of the Eileen Cox Legacy Fund and the full backing of the UK WCCM Trustees and the guidance of Meditatio. I was able to start twice weekly meditation sessions at the peaceful Chapel at the MAP Centre in downtown Middlesbrough a week or so after our return and shortly before the lock down was imposed. Indeed, we are now being funded to develop a working partnership between Meditatio and MAP which I'm confident will bear much fruit as we move forward.

We are now developing this vital work online so that the momentum isn't lost too much and can then resume the face to face healing work when we are able. Part of the funding through WCCM will include more retreats for this group as well as for people doing their best to cope with their addiction and homelessness issues, issues sadly compounded by this current pandemic.

As an Oblate it is my privilege to serve my Community and I'm very grateful that Fr Laurence, Meditatio and the WCCM UK Trustees are backing this sacred work of taking meditation to where it is very needed, amongst people living on the very margins of society. I'm also grateful for the organisational help of Ailsa Adamson

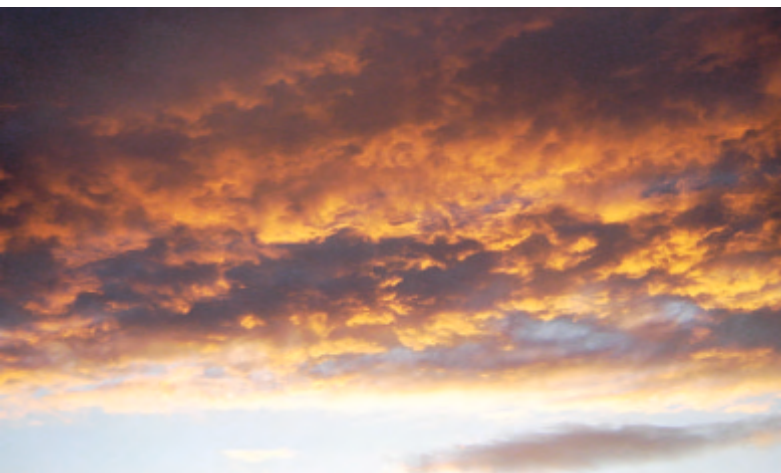


from MAP and for the wonderful support and warmth of welcome we received from Fr Christopher, Fr Richard, and all the Ampleforth Community as well as my good friend and fellow meditator Mary Sturges who lives in Ampleforth Village and so readily volunteered to share her loving heart to our group of beleaguered souls from all over the world, all of whom now dispersed and in lock down on some of the grittiest estates of industrial Teesside.



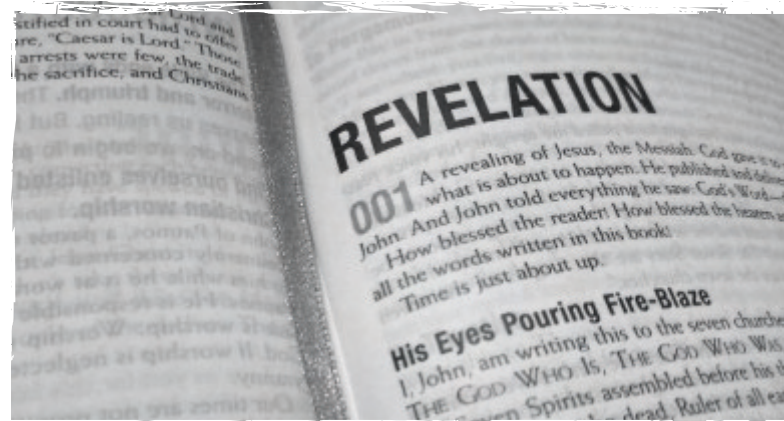
**“There was silence in heaven for about half an hour” (Revelation 8:1):
Lectio Divina on the Book of Apocalypse**
by Stefan Gillow Reynolds, Ireland
Oblate Co-ordinator

The last book of the Bible is an unusual choice for contemplative reading, however, the times we are in prompted my choice this Lent. One thing one can never say about this book is that it is boring! It is probably one of those books of the Bible which St Benedict in his Rule would have advised not to read in the late evening as it would kindle the imagination and ‘fears of the night.’ “Such



books,” he says, however, “should be read at other times” (Rule 42:3-4). Still, I went at it with a study guide for, especially with a book like this with a kaleidoscope of imagery, it is easy to be miss-read and look for fulfilment of prophecies when we

hardly know what they are referring to. So before Lectio I had to do some background reading. What time of history is this book relevant to?



The consensus of Biblical scholarship nowadays shows that there are three strands woven together in the Book of Revelation: the pastoral, liturgical and the historio-prophetic. These themes or motifs cross over at many times in the text. The pastoral is central in the ‘letters to the Churches’ in the opening chapters. The author John of Patmos is an elder of those communities but he is in exile, imprisoned on the isle of Patmos. He is not to be mistaken for the disciple John, author of the Gospel, however, like the more famous John this elder is also a contemplative and a mystic. The book starts by saying he was “in the spirit on the Lord’s day” (1:10). Later, he is invited into heaven and is again “in the spirit” (4:2). There he participates in a heavenly liturgy. This is the second major theme of the book. It is a book which has more liturgical refrains than any other in the Bible. It has been seen as a window into the early Christian liturgy. Throughout the Book of Revelation adoration and contemplation is woven between the historio-prophetic drama. This is the third major theme. The historical setting for the book is the persecution of Christians by the Roman Emperor Domitianus in the mid 90’s of the first century. This is when the book was written. The book’s main object is to strengthen the faith of those who were being persecuted or going through hard times in any way. It says, don’t

lose faith or lose heart if things seem to go wrong.

The Greek word ‘apokalupsis’ means “unveiling” and the author seems to feel that what he sees is relevant for all times. The book both makes clear what has recently happened, and unveils the future. There are allusions to the major persecution at the time of Nero twenty-five years before. The infamous ‘number of the beast’ is a Jewish numerical code for ‘Nero Caesar’. The book also takes history forward foretelling the destruction of the Roman Empire. Babylon is the code for Rome – the former being the ancient enemy of Israel. So the prophecies are tied in to what had happened in the Old Testament. The seven heads of the dragon and of the beast are the seven hills on which Rome was built. John of Patmos disguises the criticism of the Empire so as to not aggravate the persecution, otherwise communities found with copies suffer more.

These three themes have to be somewhere at the back of our mind if we use this complex book for Lectio. If we read the book slowly and prayerfully for ourselves, we may see (like I did) that the fruits also came in three forms. Firstly, the book carries both a challenge and a consolation. This is the pastoral side. The challenge is to refocus our attention on Christ as the Lord of history. Even in times of crisis when the future seems fearful or unknown what unveiled in crisis is within God’s providence. What lies hidden behind events is not so much conspiracy theories of some malevolent intent but God’s sovereign care. The challenge is to give more attention to the good that comes out of evil and to recognise that that goodness is greater than any evil. Sometimes when all seems awry the inherent goodness of people comes to the fore. The unveiling that the Book of Apocalypse shows is that, despite all suffering and appearances of disorder goodness is always stronger.

I was drawn in my Lectio to meditate on the number seven in the Book. The monsters that have seven heads (as we have seen, a coded reference to the centre of the persecuting Empire). However, more often seven is used to express completeness. Six is symbol of falling short of the mark and of worldliness. Symbolically, the world was created in seven days. To miss the Sabbath, the day of rest, was to stay within secular time, to refer to things only in terms of this world. Seven opens us to sacred time. The trials recorded in Revelation are of seven seals, seven trumpets and then seven vials. These trials symbolise the un-making of things, the ‘undoing’ of the seven days of creation. The lights of heaven are extinguished, the seas roll back, animals and humans are purged. The accounts are frightening. It depicts creation in reverse, the unravelling of order. However, the message of consolation is this destruction paves way for a greater goodness. It made me look in hope for what may come out of crisis.

The seventh of each of these trails represents the recapitulation, where, like in Genesis, God stops the show, to show all is well. In Revelation, unlike Genesis, however, it is not the making but the breaking apart of things that is happening. Yet destruction is also part of God’s creativity, for it allows new birth. “Behold,” the book concludes, “I make all things new!” (21:5). The breaking of seventh seal particularly drew my attention. It shows that the final response to any crisis is silence. “There was silence in heaven for about half an hour” (8:1). It reminded me of our meditation practice, and of something John Main once wrote:

“As we are unformed Christ is formed in us. As we enter the silence within us we are entering a void in which we are unmade. We cannot remain the person we were or thought we were. But we are in fact not being destroyed but awakened to the eternally fresh source of our being.

become aware that we are being created. We are springing from the Creator's hand and returning to him in love.

The curious thing is the specifically about the time of silence in the last unveiling. This is a breaking in of sacred time, of Kairos, into history which is measured chronologically. This time "of about half an hour" comes as a conclusion to an account of the heavenly liturgy in Ch.7. This may reflect how the early Christian community had a period of silence ("of about half an hour") at the end of their liturgy which, unlike its heavenly prototype, was performed within the confines of time, a period of silence that brought home to those participating the completion of God's action, a taste of God's Sabbath rest. In the Book of Revelation history, liturgy and spiritual injunction are woven together. What happens in time shares in what it eternal.

The message I seemed to get from reading the book slowly during the time of lockdown was, 'Do not fear'. Before the opening of the seventh seal it is announced that it will be on earth as it is in heaven:

"The lamb at the centre of the heavenly throne will be the shepherd, and he will bring us to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from our eyes" (7:17).

The silence "for about half an hour" that comes after is a response, the realization that God even here is in control. What seems like destruction is part of creation. We will be shown "a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth has passed away" (21:1). The unmaking of the old and worn world order leads to something better: "Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away" (12:4).

At this time of pandemic I was, therefore, curiously reassured by meditating on the Book of

Apocalypse. That, i) nothing happens without God's providence, ii) despite all appearances the powers of evil in the world never have the upper hand, iii) what seems like destruction is a breaking open so that something new may be born, iv) the ragged events of time are tearings in the veil that shrouds the mystery of God's plan. What is revealed, in glimpses, is love. The tree of life and the holy city are seen by John of Patmos "coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for his husband" (21:2). At this time of pandemic it is the healing of love that we are wait for. Revelation ends with an invitation to "the Tree of Life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations." (22:2)



Our silence, "for about half an hour" morning and evening, helps us dip into the completion of God's plan. Liturgy - in the opening of the last seal - finds its fulfilment in silence. A seal is not broken as an end in itself but to open a scroll. The breaking described in Book of Revelation announces a story of new life. John of Patmos begins his Revelation by being "in the spirit." That is what we do in meditation. We find our own spirit, "our lifeline to the Spirit of God," as John Main puts it. "The Spirit bears witness to our spirit," St Paul writes (Rom 8:16). John of Patmos says that the prayer of the Spirit and the liturgy of heaven is but one word: "The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come'." A prayer-word echoed in every prayer here on earth that what is in heaven may be

here below. "Let everyone who hears say, 'Come'." The lamb who is on the heavenly throne and yet is shepherd here below reassures us, at the very end of the book, "Surely I am coming soon. Amen, Maranatha!" (20:20)

p.s. Is there a coincidence this pandemic came in 2020?

Coronavirus: A Time of Crisis, or a Time of Discernment for All

by the Italian Oblate Community

As the etymology of the word "crisis" suggests (both Italian and English took this word from Greek and Latin), this difficult time of lockdown has been an opportunity for choice, discernment, judgment within a complex and troubled lapse of time.

As we all know, in large parts of the world our lives, our habits have changed in few days, for some unfortunately for the worse, for others, however, an opportunity has arisen not only to review the priorities that we give to our existence, but also to learn a lesson and to exercise our creativity, a skill difficult to use in our daily routines.

Meditation according to the teachings of John Main helps us to accept reality for what it is, to put it in the right perspective, and, if possible, to make it fruitful in any circumstance of our lives.

So, from the hassle of having to cancel the annual meeting of the Italian oblates - scheduled for the end of April and now rescheduled for the end of June (and as always open also to all members of the community) - new ideas and possibilities arose.

The Italian community has, in fact, started a daily meditation at 8.30 am, in order to be of support, through meditation, to many people who are alone, or who, deprived of their group, could find themselves disheartened in continuing the meditation practice. The attendance and feedback

we have had has been positive, even the sense of community has increased.

The Italian Community is obviously well aware of the fact that online meetings can never replace meeting together in a room and thus perceiving the real and tangible meditative presence of other people. But this additional opportunity, to be accepted critically, has also laid the foundation for a new initiative: a monthly meeting that from May 2020 onwards sees the Italian oblates meeting for a couple of hours to recite the Divine Office, meditate together, read the Rule of Saint Benedict (or the Gospel) and reflect on the role, the difficulties and, why not, on the joys of the role of the oblation in our lives.

We are confident that this additional opportunity will unite and create deep bonds and help one another, as Benedict from Nursia hoped.

This time of lockdown, never experienced before by our generations, at least in these latitudes, has also led to the beginning of the oblatinal path, therefore with the postulancy, of a new member: Enos Mantoani.



Enos described why this was the "good time" to undertake the journey in the Oblate community: "For a long time, I have been attracted to monasticism and the rhythmic days of the monks.

In particular, during the retreat of young adults held in Bonnevaux in July 2019 I was further confirmed in the goodness of dividing the days in a fair balance of physical activity, work, study and contemplative dimension. And then, during a talk with Father Laurence Freeman, a seed was planted: "Why don't you try the path of oblation?", Father Laurence asked me in reply to my question on how I could continue on the path of Christian meditation. Getting in touch with Giovanni Foffano - responsible for the Italian oblates - and with other oblates of the Italian community has allowed me to deepen what it could mean walking on this path. And when the lockdown period began, I said to myself that the time and the opportunity had come to try and divide my days in order to create healthy habits that may be able to guide me in these difficult days for most of us, especially from the point of view of psychological pressure. Therefore, with the help of Giovanni and Don Alfredo Jacopozzi, who will be my mentor during the postulancy, I started on April 21 (the day was chosen to put myself under the tutelage of Anselmo d'Aosta, also known as Saint Anselm of Canterbury or Anselm of Bec, who was a Benedictine monk, abbot, philosopher and theologian) this adventure that I hope will bear many fruits in my life and in the lives of the Italian and international community."



On Transformation During Lockdown

by Jo Koppert, UK seeker/postulant

At the beginning of the year I sensed a gentle nudge, which from previous experiences I recognised to be God's, to begin to explore the oblate path. This gentle nudge came after a very painful relationship breakup and I found myself in a new territory I needed to learn to navigate.

I made contact with a local oblate cell and was invited to attend a meeting to get a taste. As I reflected on the reasons as to why this might be a path God is directing me along, the lockdown happened. I anticipated that my exploration will be put on hold. However, through regular calls I got to know a few of the oblates and we were able to support each other through the ups and downs of the new life we found ourselves in. And that was a surprising gift.

There were many gifts and graces to follow. The zoom meditation and oblate group were some others. A sense of community started to unravel and strengthen my faith as I would begin the week with the morning zoom oblate prayer. Sarah Bachelard's course on Christian virtue has been a turning point in my understanding and settling of the confusing thoughts as to how my life had taken this most hurtful turn with the relationship break up.

The oblate retreat that followed solidified even further the importance of deep listening as a way of obedience to God. This is the way of transformation. Pain is the door we can step through so that God would heal us. For me part of becoming whole was developing a friendship with myself where I can offer loving kindness and compassion to myself and in turn, to others. And this is the essence of community that I have been experiencing in the lockdown. We are not meant to do it by ourselves and to arrive to some perfection after we have been tucked away in isolation. We are called to embrace who we are and offer this gift to others and our freedom, perhaps, might give them permission to be just as they.

I am learning that ego is here to stay. However, I am also learning to befriend it and hold it in loving awareness without judging or criticising myself. Simply noticing that it is here and paying attention is the work of the mantra. As a result, an internal spaciousness develops which enables me to be less reactive.

I have come to recognise three stages in the journey of life: orientation, disorientation and reorientation. We don't control out transformation and inner healing but we can fully participate in God transforming us one moment at a time by being present to what is and paying attention to what arises. Thus, responding to gentle nudges of God within a supportive community and we reorienting ourselves again along the path.

Online Meditation

by Anita Finnigan, UK Oblate

I live in the beautiful county of Dorset in the southern part of the UK. I have been meditating for a number of years and lead a group in Dorchester where I live. Since the lockdown we continue 'to meditate together' at the same time and on the same day and each week I email members of the group (nine core members) readings and the opening and closing prayers. It keeps us connected and the group find this very helpful.

Lockdown for me also seemed an ideal opportunity to give online meditation 'a go'! And it doesn't disappoint! It is such a good discipline to meditate at the same time every morning and every evening and with chosen readings. The facilitator chooses readings for before and after meditation after which some leave and some remain to discuss the readings or some aspect of their spiritual journey. It is a great opportunity to connect with other like-minded people and learn from each other. One gets a great feeling of friendship and fellowship with these people, now friends really from all over the world.

When asked if I would consider becoming a facilitator, my first reaction was 'I can't possibly do that'! That same day I came across the words in Psalm 54 'O Lord, I will trust in you'. So what more could I say but 'yes'! And I must say, joining the online meditation group and becoming a facilitator has deepened my spiritual life. It has also prompted me to dip into the many spiritual books I have on my bookshelf, which has been really good. So I would say to any of you out there reading this article to 'give it a go'. It will not disappoint!



Meditating Online with Friends and a Cat

by Aileen B Urquhart, UK Oblate

The morning maranatha bids me come.
I settle into silence. Nothing heard
Except the leader's gong, the laptop's hum,
And from afar the rumour of a bird.
Upright, alert but gently in the room
We sound the word in silence. Rhythmic, slow.
The universe enfolds us in her womb
And we enfold the One who made it so.
But then the lightest leap, the softest purr,
A little kitten joins me on the chair
My arm, robotic, strokes his silken fur
Until he settles down into the prayer,
And all of us breathe, purr, and pray together
In that eternal moment, now, and ever.

A time to go deeper into the silence

Maria Zakharova, Albert Zakharov, Ukraine NOC



These are strange and surprising times. Pandemic crisis has a special character - it brings silence to our cities, whether we like it or not. Here in Ukraine we understand that we are not ready to face this challenge, either internally or externally. Therefore, so many people now suffer from the effects of this disease, fear of illness and loss and the loneliness of quarantine. But for our local meditation community, this time has become an opportunity to go deeper into the silence. Now we can do it together online, forgetting about the distances between our local groups located in so many different cities. We have launched three weekly online groups, and we continue to translate the Fr. Laurence's Lenten reflections. Each time we meet in the Zoom chatroom, we recall that our meditation is part of our community's web of silence. We just want to thank every community meditator for our common presence. We hope that our local community will benefit from this time, using it as a free space where we will learn just to be. After the epidemic is over, we look forward to being with one another again, so we could see in our meditation and in each other the Word which has become Flesh.

In and Out of the Tomb:

A Holy Saturday Reflection

by Argel Tuason, Philippines Oblate

“Each day go in, before you go out into the world.”
Eileen O’Donnell

John 11: 34-44: “Where have you laid him?” he asked. “Lord, come and see,” they said. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, “See how much he loved him!” ... Once again troubled in spirit, moved by the deepest emotions, Jesus approached the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across it. “Take away the stone,” Jesus directed ... They then took away the stone ... Having said this, he called loudly, “Lazarus, come out!” The dead man came out, bound head and foot with linen strips, his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus told them, “Unbind him, and let him go!”



We can look at an experience in different ways. For some, an experience can look very dim; however, for others who look at the same experience they can still see the light at the end of the tunnel. We can look at the metaphor of the tomb in many ways. I would like to share the two ways by which I would like to look at the metaphor of the tomb. I can look at it as a grave, I get feelings of fear, sadness, resentment, suffering, pain, withdrawal, alienation, loneliness, emptiness, lament, loss, being lost, trapped, no exit, total darkness and death. Or, at the same time I can see the same tomb as an archetype of “the cave” (here I imagine our forebears who lived in caves) – a place of protection, refuge, stability, spaciousness, openness, receptiveness, fire, warmth, togetherness, comfort, solace, embrace, depth, womb, fecundity, resting place, abode, a home.

In this time of intense and what we call in the Philippines as enhanced community quarantine, our own busy and isolated individual lives were suddenly interrupted and we are forced to stay home, to stay home with our families. It is

interesting to note that the word quarantine used to have a religious meaning. According to Oxford English Dictionary, the word originally came from the medieval French word for 40 days referring to Jesus' forty-day fast in the desert. It also meant the period of the public penitents' temporary exclusion from the church. It was a period when public sinners with notorious and scandalous trespasses need to do penance, fast, dress in sackcloth and ash, abstain from bathing, shaving, wearing shoes or sleeping in their own beds for 40 days. The public penitents' ordeal ended on Maundy Thursday during a "Mass of Remission." This practice ended centuries ago, but it has left its mark on our language.

How are we doing, not just as individuals but as a family in the midst of this Covid19 pandemic and amidst the enforced home quarantine? How do we relate and feel towards our own family, our own home? Does home feel like being trapped in a "tomb"? Or, do we feel the "cave" like warmth, nurture and protection of our homes?

Let me share with you an excerpt from the reflection of a friend and fellow lay monastic on "How can families be more faithful than fearful in this time of CoVID-19?" Her experience with her family is very telling. Just a brief background about her and her family. She's a flourishing professional and working mom, a mother of 5 children and lives in a household of 7 persons – 4 senior citizens (her included), 1 'Person with disability' as her youngest son has autism and 2 single adults who are working from home. According to her reflection, she finds it "challenging to be cooped up the whole day with that many people... The primary challenge we face is that our place is not psychologically big enough to be housing our egos and to be dealing with everyone's idiosyncrasies the whole day. And so, it cannot be helped that there are emotional upsets and skirmishes here and there... We are entering the 4th week since the quarantine was imposed and I could see that some of our

unmindful coping mechanisms are not working for us – bingeing on Netflix and YouTube, online stalking and chatting, sleeping too much or not sleeping enough, laziness in exercising at home. Not everyone regularly helps out with household chores as we are used to having someone to do them... especially because we are adjusting to the 'new norm' where the mundane housework takes precedence over everything else – our house helps are not around to help us cook and clean as they are in their own families. I thought I would have a lot of time for my home projects but no..." And in her responses to the question "How can families be more faithful than fearful in this time of CoVID-19?" She said that to cope we must "be present to the here and now."

This is what the practice of Christian meditation trains us for – to learn the discipline of paying attention. Saying and giving our wholehearted attention only to the mantra, laying aside and leaving behind everything. By practicing this we learn how to pay attention and be truly and fully present to the divine within. This discipline is what the Buddhists call as being mindful and what I would like to personally call as being "present-full" because as the Filipino expression goes we can be physically present but mentally absent. If we are really present to the divine within, we will as a consequence be really present to the divine in others that is why I am invited as well to be present-full with my kapwa-tao, my chosen companion or partner, who for Filipinos is not just a fellow human being but a mirror image of one's inner self and humanity. In other words, I am called to come out of my tendencies to be self-absorbed and self-centered. In the words of John Main, "Meditation begins with a call that awakens us out of the coma of self-preoccupation."

For the past weeks since the quarantine, my head has been buried in writing my thesis, leading different online prayer groups for healing and protection from CoVID-19 and preparing for this



talk. Regretfully, I haven't been fully and truly present to and with my family. I was entombed into my own little "pious, spiritual and intellectual" world. My family has been enjoying movie marathons together in the living room while I have been alone in my own room, busy writing my thesis. Not once did I join them. I am entombed. My brothers have been nudging me to join them in doing an exercise in our backyard. I have been turning them down. They have given up and just left me in peace because they usually catch me with my earphones on, busy "praying" with my prayer groups. Entombed. Meanwhile, my partner has been busying himself, going solo, with lip syncing and doing his short dance numbers through the social media app TikTok and enjoying watching his own performances on Facebook. I have been oblivious, too self-absorbed preparing for today's talk to pay any attention to him. Entombed.

Given this opportune time to be with our family in this period of quarantine, have I and have we been truly and fully present for and with our loved ones? Or, are we only "virtually" present to each other, physically present but mentally absent, our heads, eyes and hands too busy with our gadgets to even look up and look each other in the eye?

Lastly, my father who is a retired senior citizen and hasn't gotten any cash assistance from our government has been asking me to search the internet to know the process for borrowing money from the Social Security System through a calamity loan and to hound the town government through their Facebook page to ask when will their representatives pay our house a visit to give out an application form for cash assistance through the Social Amelioration Program of the government. My family has not received any relief our town government yet, we who are all jobless at the moment. The town government has been to the outskirts of our subdivision giving relief goods, sacks of rice and cash assistance to the urban poor, but as of this writing, they have not passed by our house yet. We have not received

even a single can of sardines.

In the meantime, I haven't fully explored the internet yet and paid attention to the request of my Papa. I have been using my mobile data allowance for my online prayer groups and activities for the Triduum. I am entombed. Entombed too with my own concerns for survival including budgeting the remaining money I have for prepaid load (phone credits), since I have been out of work since the lockdown.

In this time of home quarantine, when will I heed the voice of Jesus through my family who is my nearest kapwa or neighbour calling loudly to me to "Come out" of the tomb of my own self-absorbed world and be truly present for and with them? I, who have been praying for others and other families who are affected by the pandemic. Like Lazarus, when will the linen strips wrapped around my head and foot be unbound so that I can come out of my tomb and clearly see what is going on right in front of me and see what is happening right in my own backyard and be able to respond to my loved ones and their needs appropriately and present-fully?

Hopefully, I will be able to practice being more present-full to my family and avoid the temptation of being trapped into a tomb full of myself and my ego. Instead, may I have a stable, spacious, warm, and caring cave within me which is fully open and willing to be a source of comfort, nurture and refuge for my family and kapwa in this time of crisis. As an Irish proverb says, "It is in the shelter of each other that the people live." This is only possible if I learn and practice each day to go in before I go out into the world. Because according to John Main:

"The journey to our innermost center is the journey beyond our own limitations. If this inner journey is a death to egoism it is to the same degree a birth into life." (Community of Love)

"The journey to our own heart is a journey into every heart." (Monastery without Walls)

NEWS

WCCM Oblates part of planning team for International Oblate Congress 2022



Photo below was taken at San Anselmo during a planning team meeting 6th - 12th November 2019. At that time they were working on Congress taking place Nov. 2021 but as you can see from Abbot General's letter this has now been put back a year til Nov. 2022. All in the photo - apart from the religious and priests - are Oblates. They are attached to different monastic communities around the world. They have come together to

form an International Planning Team organizing the next Benedictine Oblate Congress in Rome: Elba Rodriguez (second from left in second row) has succeeded Eileen Dutt as WCCM representative on the team.

Left to right and bottom up

First Row: Abbot Primate Gregory J. Polan OSB, Nancy Barwell (France), Judith Valente (USA), Theresia Kwon (Korea), Giorgio Marte (Italy), Francis In Keun Lee (Korea), Jean Ritzke Rutherford (Germany).

Second Row: Fr. Benoit Alloggia (USA), Larina Reyes-Smith (Canada/Philippines), Shirley France (USA), Janis Dopp (USA), Stephanie Smith (USA), Benedetta Reese (USA), Elba Rodriguez (Colombia/France), Sophia Ange (Senegal), Elisabeth Roux (France)

Third Row: Sven Cockx (Belgium/Netherlands), Martin Grüger (Germany), Fr. Jeremy King (USA), Sylvain Vossoure (Belgium), Helen Helcova (Czech Republic), Jordi Gubern (Spain/Catalonia), Michel Gammon (Canada), Bertrand Godefroid (Belgium), Melanie Godefroid (Belgium), Fr. Samuel Helqvist (UK).



Abbot Primate Notker Wolf birthday

Hi dear fellow oblates,
as you might remember it was Abbot Primate Notker Wolf who invited oblates for the first and the following Benedictine Oblate World Congresses in Rome in order to empower them as valuable part of the Benedictine order.

Just in case you might like to write to Abbot Notker Wolf for the occasion of his 80st birthday today here is his e-mail-address: notker@ottilien.de.

With love, pax and joy of life
Martin ObIOSB

Letter from Abbot General, Gregory Polan, OSB to Benedictine Oblates,
sent at the time pandemic was rife in Italy.



BADIA PRIMAZIALE SANT'ANSELMO
Abate Primate

Dear Benedictine Oblates,

Greetings of Easter peace from Sant'Anselmo in Rome. I pray that this note finds you well, safe, and at peace during these challenging days of the coronavirus pandemic. Please know that we pray each day for our Oblates throughout the world, that they may escape this difficult and challenging virus that can be so debilitating, and even cause death. Let us pray for one another.

Because of this pandemic, and because of the challenges of international travel for the coming months, we have decided to postpone the Congress of Abbots in September 2020. Because of this, it seems wise, after consultation with Father Benoît and the Core Team for the next Congress, to postpone that important event until November 2022. There are so many things that are uncertain in our lives at this moment with this attack of the coronavirus, so it is important that we look to the future with hope and with safety for everyone involved.

In closing, I send my best wishes for God's continued blessings upon you, your loved ones, and all your endeavors. May God's blessings rest upon us all, keeping us in providential care of our loving Lord.

Sincerely in the risen Christ,

+ *Gregory J. Polan, OSB*
Abbot Primate Gregory Polan, O.S.B.



Big Expansion among New Zealand Oblate Community



Greetings from New Zealand. My name is Jo Ward. I'm the new coordinator of the oblate community here. The official handover took place at our biennial retreat held just one week before the country went into a four week lockdown. Hugh McLaughlin has faithfully led the group for 11 years. Over the past year he has gently mentored me into the role which he models so well. It's reassuring to know that I have his continued support. It has been a good process.

About myself... I've never had a partner or children. Presently I live in my own dwelling on a Catholic Worker farm. Here we do life a bit counter culturally. Dorothy Day was the cofounder of the international Catholic Worker movement. She herself was Benedictine oblate who loved chanting the psalms. So we have some Benedictine like values. Hospitality for instance whereby all are welcomed. Then there's simplicity in which we seek to live with few gadgets. We grow most of our food. Social justice

which is often expressed in protests. Pacifism and following the non-violent Jesus is also important as is living in community. I'm the contemplative one among the activists but it's very much viewed as a vital role. I lead a weekly meditation group at my place on Sunday evenings. I've been here since 2012. Prior to that I spent 17 years in Manila, Philippines with a Christian mission.

We have 42 in our oblate community in New Zealand. We are scattered through the country. Some are geographically isolated. Like all oblates we are a group of people searching for a deeper and more relevant spirituality. We accept that each of our journeys is unique. We are learning to live the Benedictine way and to become a community of love.

My desire as the new New Zealand coordinator is to continue the good work that has begun and to support all members of our group in a loving and caring way. Recent times of contact with the International Oblate Coordinator, Eileen Dutt, have been encouraging and helpful. She has reminded me that we are part of a wider network of oblates who support and pray for each other. It is indeed humbling to belong to this monastery without walls.

New Zealand CCM Oblates gathering 2020

by Nick and Linda Polaschek, NZ Oblates

Our biennial gathering of the New Zealand Community for Christian Meditation Benedictine Oblates was held from 16-19 March at a retreat centre in rural Wairarapa run by the Magnificat community. We returned to this place because our last gathering held here went so well. While the weather was sometimes chilly and windy the place is very suitable for our group and there are beautiful walks in the hills around the retreat centre.



Our biennial gathering of the New Zealand Community for Christian Meditation Benedictine Oblates was held from 16-19 March at a retreat centre in rural Wairarapa run by the Magnificat community. We returned to this place because our last gathering held here went so well. While the weather was sometimes chilly and windy the place is very suitable for our group and there are beautiful walks in the hills around the retreat centre.

22 out of our national oblate community of 44 were able to attend. Participants included people who had made their final oblation going back as far as 2001 (in Australia) and several who had become postulants last year. The gathering was led by our new national coordinator Jo Ward assisted by long time outgoing coordinator Hugh McLaughlin.

Each day included four Offices with meditations and two forum sessions on topics led by members of our Oblate community. We observed silence according to the monastic tradition from the last Office at night to the first forum session in the morning. During the rest of the day we were able to talk with others in our oblate community whom we rarely meet because our members are widely scattered throughout the country. Many took the opportunity to meet face to face with Jo as the coordinator.

On each day the two forum sessions were led by local cell groups from across the country providing input for shared reflection on several relevant topics: what community means to us; new beginnings in our lives and oblatehood; solitude and curating space for silence; rethinking oblate formation and mentoring. On the last topic it was agreed that many individuals would benefit from a more structured pattern of support than has been generally available as they have explored this particular path of the oblate within the wider Christian meditation community. Various suggestions were made which will inform new national guidance being developed on this topic.

All of the new participants shared with the group about their journey towards joining the Benedictine oblate community. There was also an informal talk about the recent WCCM pilgrimage to India, which involved engagement with various Benedictine and meditative communities. At a ceremony on Tuesday in the community chapel Tim Auld made his final profession as an Oblate after a number of years as a novice and four meditators, Alison Kerr, Karen Moynagh, Marie Shepherd and Vincent Maire, made their novice professions.

On the last evening we fare-welled with thanks Hugh McLaughlin as national coordinator for Oblates, a role he has held for the last 12 years, while also serving the wider NZCCM community in various other ways over many years. Ross



Miller, long-time collaborator with Hugh, gave a witty and insightful talk based on his memories about Hugh's long service. Others also contributed their thoughtful thanks to Hugh.

All of us who attended the gathering appreciated the opportunity to be together as a group who share a commitment to the Benedictine form of the Christian a way within the NZCCM community. Our appreciation was heightened by the awareness that, given increasing limitations on public meetings in response to the Covid 19 virus, the gathering may well not have been going ahead at all if it had been scheduled even a week later.

Formation of a UK Oblate Council – our first 6 months

by Janet Robbins, Member of UK Oblate Council

It sounds such a grand title – a Council. But in its truest sense, that is what we are; a group of just 4 people who are meeting together. We are offering one another support through discussion and sharing. We are here to fulfil the role of coordination, as National Oblate Coordinators are doing across WCCM. Instead of one person, we are 4, able to share the role, supporting the well-established and growing UK oblate community.

We have been formed for just 6 months and we are exploring ways in which we work together to meet the needs of seekers, postulants, novices and oblates. Our respective roles are becoming honed at our monthly meetings. Eileen Dutt, the International Oblate Coordinator attends and we take advice and guidance from her, but we are beginning to make our own decisions so that Eileen can be freed to support the worldwide oblate community. Here are some of the ways in which Eileen supports us all: being a single point of contact for Laurence, Guiding Board and National Oblate Coordinators; nurturing embryonic national oblate communities; ensuring

Oblate community protocols are being observed, at all times, and in all matters concerning national oblate community.

Julia Williamson, Angela Gregson, Gilly Withers and I are the 4 members of the Council. We are supported by other members of the UK oblate community. Julia looks after the twice daily online meditation groups and lovingly guides the online development. Angela coordinates the online oblate cell meetings, retreats and the publication of our quarterly newsletter Via Vitae, AND looks after the purse strings! Gilly is the custodian of the database and keeps us all informed of news and local oblate cell meetings, as well as organising quarterly cell meetings. I look after seekers and postulants, making sure they are supported in this formative part of the oblate journey and in the fullness of time, allocating mentors, who I also support.

There are other aspects of our roles that ensure we retain strong links with the wider meditation community both in the UK and world-wide.

So, here we are and I am delighted to say that we have grown together to form a strong bond. We can share more of our work in the coming months.



Planning a UK Oblate Retreat weekend

by Angela Gregson UK Oblate responsible for retreats.

Angela, said our UK Oblate Coordinator at that time, David McKenna, please could you explore places in the more northern part of England where we could hold an Oblate Retreat Weekend for in

particular our Oblates who are unable to come to our Annual UK Oblate Weekend at The Monastery of Christ our Saviour, Turvey, either because of their own health issues or those of someone they care for, to attend a Community gathering along with anyone else who is interested in learning more about the Oblate Path.

So, I got on my computer and looked at many places, some were too large, some too small. Those that were a suitable size, I emailed asking what dates they had available for 2020. Some replied that they were already fully booked, but Whaley Hall near Buxton in Derbyshire could take us the weekend of May 15th-17th. We booked it and were already taking bookings and looking at the shape of the weekend when the Pandemic and lock down because of it was about to happen. We couldn't be together in person. Should we cancel the Retreat and wait for lock-down to end? Should we go ahead, with an online one? It was a new way of doing it, but couldn't we make it work? These were the questions that Janet Robbins (our, UKOC Oblate with responsibility for formation) and I were having a zoom meeting about.

Yes! We would launch out into new waters and make this a weekend which would nourish all who would be attending i.e. those who had booked for the weekend @ Whaley Hall.

Janet, Sandie, Mark and I formed a team and we met on zoom every week for about 6 weeks, talking about what the weekend should consist of, just as we would have done for the physical one. The difference being hoping the technology worked throughout the weekend and the times for personal reflection would be in the participants own homes and gardens, not in the grounds of the Hall or in the little chapel there.

16 people took part including Eileen Dutt

International Oblate Coordinator and the 4 of us. Two participants had problems getting into the zoom room on the Friday evening although 1 persevered and did manage it eventually. The other was contacted with further guidance and was able to join on the Saturday morning.

All went well with Zoom until we should have come together for the last Worship Session. No one could get back in. Phone calls were made to all, and it was agreed to try again an hour later. We did all manage to get in, but most couldn't see anyone and one had no working microphone. We found out later that there was a worldwide Zoom problem at that time. The technical hiccup in no way spoiled the wonderful Community Spirit which was so palpable even though we were not together in 1 physical place, because it was felt at the center of our beings, in God.

We, the team, felt it had been a fruitful weekend for all from the thoughts shared by participants both then and by emails afterwards.

Oblate Online Weekend Retreat May 2020

Bernie Roberts, UK Oblate

In May during lockdown, I participated in the UK Oblate Retreat which was for the first time held via a Zoom meeting online. Facilitated by four members of the WCCM the theme was 'Reflections on Simplicity a focus on St Benedict's 12 steps of humility.' At first, I thought, 'I wonder how this is going to work'... but may I say before I go any further...for me, it was a truly enriching experience.

The programme was like any other retreat I have attended. Starting with a welcome and





introductions, there were four sessions which included talks on humility from the rule of St Benedict led by Janet Robbins, the readings, night, morning and evening prayers, lectio, meditation and times for sharing led by either Angela Gregson, Sandie Cutts or Mark Ball.

My family were aware that I would be absconding to the spare bedroom for the best part of the weekend and there I had a dressing table which became my writing table together with the iPad. Here I could see 9 retreatants at any one given time out of 17. There was also an opportunity to have a short one to one session with one of the four team members if anyone so wished.

As a seeker on the Oblate path I found to my surprise the rhythm which is experienced on a retreat, could be applied within my own home. The weekend was set aside for God and I was even able to prepare the evening meal in silence. After the evening session at 7.00pm on the Saturday we sat as a family for dinner. During the free time in-between the sessions I wrote up all my notes into a beautiful journal a friend had given me. This is something on a normal retreat I would not generally do...so for me this time it was a blessing as I have some wonderful words of wisdom which I can cherish and ponder upon in the future. I was so absorbed in my world of reflecting and writing I did not have the time to venture outside, the time just flew by...

The time for sharing was beautiful...both calm and stilling and the collective words of wisdom shared were very moving. When asked if we would like to reflect on the weekend and say what came to

mind...for me it was to move forward...which has many connotations, that which again I will ponder upon.

I so enjoy retreats held at various locations. There is nothing to compare with meeting others seeking Gods kingdom, sharing stories and being cared for by the hospitality team so one can just BE. But an extremely wonderful alternative in times like the present and for those who cannot travel, online meditation is a close second. Like any retreat I did not want it to end...thankfully I was still left with the inner feeling of peace which I have experienced in the past after being on a retreat. The amazing thing was that this time it was within the walls of my own home.

Maybe this is just one part of the moving forward...embracing the internet.

I have since this gathering expressed a wish to become a postulant (another part of the meaning moving forward) I feel this is a way of God saying try and bring your human self fully forward and leave your false self behind. I am very blessed to have found such a wonderful community of love with such a wealth of wisdom.

A huge thank you again to all involved, I have been reflecting on my notes as I write this and the wonderful feelings I experienced then...have re-emerged.

I look forward to meeting again with everyone hopefully in the not too far distant future.

Truly a blessed time for all...it was more than enough!

OBITUARY

Margaret Stone (1946 - 2019)

Margaret Stone as with all of us have many descriptors:- daughter, sister, nurse, wife, mother, grandmother, but one that she wore well in her later life was that of a sincere and committed oblate. Margaret made her Final Oblation in Brisbane, Australia in 2011. Her presence at cell days contributed not only to an exploration of John Main's writing and Benedictine spirituality but the warmth of this unpretentious soul was felt and valued by all. And we thank Margaret for just being Margaret.

Life has many vicissitudes one has to deal with and Margaret had her share. However, when life challenges us we, in turn, have to confront our challenges. This Margaret did, when her vision was partially lost it obviously made reading difficult so she looked for an electronic alternative for the Office and other Benedictine stables. Similarly, not being able to drive to cell days wasn't going to stop her either, of course, she looked for and found an alternative.

The usual cliches like 'We will miss her' truly fall short of the lived and shared experiences of our community because we have known a person who was a genuine and generous daughter of Benedict and John Main.



Brisbane Cell, Brisbane, Australia



POEMS

PANDEMIC OR GRACE?

by Elizabeth King, Oblate

It is the worst of times and the best of times.
 It is a crucial time and an exciting time.
 Time for us to look inward, not outward...
 No going out, no driving, no socializing,
 No buying, selling or entertaining...
 Yet we can chit-chat, call our loved ones
 whom we can no longer see or touch.
 Pray and reflect -- prioritize, organize and re-assess
 our lives, our relationships
 and everything we hold dear.

The world has stopped: all are homebound.
 All is quiet and still.
 Quiet and still? On the outside and on the inside?
 Are we restless, anxious, fearful and disturbed?
 What is happening to us?
 What are we becoming?
 Can we live in the silence and stillness?
 Or are we too attuned to all the hustle and bustle --
 the nonstop honking, revving of engines, loud talking
 laughing and swearing...

Has God caused this to happen
 so our crazy world has to halt...
 Halt our ceaseless day-to-day, hour-to-hour striving
 for success, wealth, power, pleasure and fun?

Yes, we are in the 21st century,
 We are mighty and powerful
 fearless and brave.
 We have the internet, 5G,
 signals and connections to everywhere.
 We can do all things, we are invincible.

Are we really?
 Lo and behold, all in vain.
 We are slave to the little microbe, the coronavirus
 which brings all to a STOP.

Are we vulnerable? Are we human?
 Are we subject to this tiny microbe?
 Where is our power, our might, our superhuman mind?
 our invincible intellect?
 Can we not defeat this tiny intruder?

Lo and behold, we are all paralyzed --
 fearful and cautious...
 Don't do this, do that --
 to be safe.
 Are we questioning our mortality?
 Are we afraid that we are after all
 'Dust and unto dust we shall return'?

Yes, we are human beings,
 not human doings...
 But we have lost sight of our humanity...

Please Lord, help us see
 Help us look into our hearts
 and recognize that this "frenzy",
 this dervish dance has to stop
 sometime.

Now is the time for us to reflect...
 to recognize our humanity and our helplessness
 our dependence on His support and love.
 Now is the time for us to kneel and pray --
 pray for forgiveness, for compassion and for humility.
 Now is the time to mend broken promises and relationships,
 the time to forgive and to repent,
 the time to love and smile,
 the time for silence and stillness,
 And know that He is God, Our Lord.
 Amen.

**Poem inspired by Sarah Bachelard's talk series,
'A Living Hope'**

by Anne-Marie Doecke, Australian Oblate

Cactus flower	Hope's beauty
Hope's beauty	Also in us
Bursting forth	Lies waiting
From stemming fortitude	Without expectation
Its winged petals delicate	A gift of mercy
Alive with colour	In due time
A silent surprise	Flowering creativity
To behold	Strength giving life
Inspiring endurance	To others

Stability

by Stefan Reynolds, Oblate

Faced with the situation which we're faced,
like many today, I feel the chains;
the loss of freedom to travel and chose
and the money to do so, and the waste
of not being able to work, wages we lose,
fears for our own, or other's health,
or plans we have had to put on the shelf,
not knowing which way the wind will blow.

Then, in weakness, I remember I'm poor,
that the gods I made are only of gold,
easily spent, my certainties so unsure,
and learning to accept the situation,
consenting to constraints, with patience,
without whys and wherefores of explanation,
I no longer resist, for whatever is, is best,
for the chains that tie us are meant to bless.

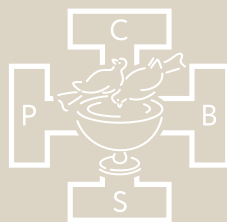
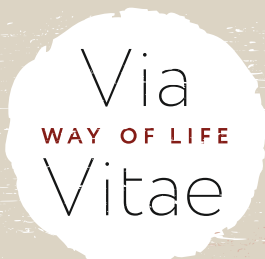
Dancing Circles of Moon

This poem 'Dancing Circles of Moon' was inspired by listening to a story from an Oblate who had experienced the threat of fires close by, a desperate drought situation and then hail damage through her sun-room roof. At midnight, she had got up to take her dogs out, and witnessed a magical scene... the moon coming through the holes in her roof...

After a year of battling	Dancing circles of moon
Job like	Shimmering on the floor
Drought, fire, storms	Unexpected in the night hours
Hail through her roof	Its beauty entrancing
She arose at midnight	Leaving her speechless
To take out her dogs	Enthralled by grace
To witness	Wondering at fear
A magical scene	No longer possible

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