

# Via WAY OF LIFE Vitae

Benedictine Oblates of  
The World Community for  
Christian Meditation

*'Set your mind on  
the kingdom before  
everything else...'*

(Matt 6:33)

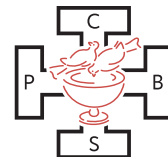
The fact that we are, in our most real being, rooted in the silence of this centre seems to us the most elusive truth of our life. But the problem is our distractedness. Our pilgrimage of meditation teaches us that in spirit and in truly we are there already, with our Father who has called us to be there, who created us to be there and who loves us to be there.

**John Main**  
The Present Christ

The World  
Community  
for Christian  
Meditation



BENEDICTINE OBLATE NEWSLETTER  
No. 27, February 2021



Extract from **THE OBLATE PATH (2021)**  
by **Laurence Freeman**



As modern society passes through its extreme period of crisis and (let's hope) an evolution into a better world, we need every scrap of wisdom we can find. The Rule of St Benedict and the monastic wisdom it distils can be a source of hope, vision and imagination for building a new way of life both during and after this time of darkness where the light can shine. But is sometimes hard for people to see or trust. Many of our social institutions are in crisis, deep flaws are visible in protecting human rights and the just distribution of wealth; blind greed and a lack of reverence for the sacredness of nature threaten our planet and simple trust, the essential quality of all human organization, is being eroded.

To many in secular society today monasticism is hardly perceived as a relevant source of wisdom. They are more likely to see it as an antiquarian curiosity, even a way of running away from the world and life's challenges, religious escapism. However, even a brief acquaintance with the great teachers of monastic wisdom – like Benedict himself – can make it clear that this is a gross misreading that deprives us of contact with one of humanity's most accessible sources of wisdom. The real, operational values of life, the way of dealing with daily problems, healthy lifestyle and a respect for human nature with tolerance of differences and 'weaknesses of body or character' – these are at the heart of monastic wisdom and of our current concerns. Yet, they stand apart from merely secular values because they incorporate an understanding of the transcendent dimension of human consciousness.

The monastic source of wisdom accepts certain truths as sacred and self-evident. It also tries to live them and this attempt to live one's insights (as on the oblate path) gives life more purpose and depth: for example, that human beings are not perfect or striving for any kind of perfection that can be 'achieved'; that life needs continuous calibration and rebalancing; that personal discipline needs to complement acceptance of a rule of life;

that love and service of others is integral to our spiritual growth; and, above all, that life, every person's life, has a purpose within the meaning of existence and that transcendence is necessary for that meaning to be known.

While remaining grounded in the realities and untidiness of human character and society, monastic wisdom affirms to the rest of the world that life has meaning. That meaning is life-giving and healing, restoring what is broken and making sense of the greatest hardship. It is not hidden or esoteric. It is not to be found in a purely abstract realm of thought or speculation. It is both incarnate and transcendent. Benedict's little Rule is a heroic epic of human dignity written (almost) as a soap opera. It does not romanticise the spiritual quest or treat it with false piety. It is informed by the key gospel principle that we cannot love the God whom we cannot see unless we love other people close and far. It reminds those who are not living in its lifestyle that, although we are not and will never be perfect, we are called to wholeness in the great community of being which is the meaning of holiness.

*Laurence*

### MESSAGE FROM EILEEN DUTT, International Oblate Co-Ordinator



Hello one and all,

I thought I would begin by sharing this photo that I took of the sun setting on the Middle Levels of the Fenn Waterways, Cambridge, UK. During the strange and unprecedented times last year, I often found myself using this photo for visual lectio, because for me, it captures some of the range of emotions I felt as the year unfolded. I began to see the stark reality of how much

my life had changed. I was no longer free to choose where I would like to go, whom I would like to see - in person rather virtually - even to whom I could reach out and physically touch. Even this basic instinct was no longer an option. Alongside the photo I added, "*The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it*" (John 1:5) We all have to find our way to deal with uncertainty, pain, suffering and sometimes even loss. This was one of mine - my hope is that you all found your ways too.

Something else I drew great comfort from - no surprise here - has been our community gatherings. Whilst of necessity, all have been virtual, that has not deterred us; instead through our sacramental use of technology (to quote Fr. Laurence), the majority of our meetings during 2020 - and more - still went ahead.

National Oblate Coordinators (NOC) have organised annual oblate retreats to take place online; oblate cells have continued; twice daily meditation sessions have never stopped and the really positive and affirming news coming out of all this, has been that attendance by oblates has been excellent. Well done to you all!

I must not overlook the important role, which the regular Monday meetings at Benedict's Well, have played in strengthening us all being able to connect with members of our community across continents. Our special thanks go to Jm Rebeuno, a Filipino Oblate, for ensuring a timely sending out of information was distributed to all participants and webmasters: WCCM and Oblate websites.

Please may I inform you of three changes of NOC: In France, Frédérique Saillard has stepped aside and Catherine Charriere has taken up the role. In Germany, the role has passed from Cristiane Floyd to Susanna

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Melzer. In Poland, the role has passed from Maria and Albert Zakharovy to Anna Studenska.

I began this reflection on an uncertain note- but I will finish on a positive.

During the summer of 2020, Fr. Laurence and I convened the first International Oblate Council (OC) meeting. If you are a regular member of Benedict's Well, then I hope you are beginning to feel you know the oblates who make up the OC as they now share the role of welcoming Prayer Leaders, Speakers/Witnesses to the Well.

I hope that by the time NOC receive this issue of *Via Vitae*, you will have already received your copy of the Oblate Handbook. To quote from Fr. Laurence's introduction: 'This Handbook will help us do things in a unified and orderly way in the WCCM Oblate Community.' Should you have any comments, then please send them to me for raising on your behalf, at an OC meeting.

And finally... We are all bearers of divine light and the more visible our light the greater our chance to be a source of healing, hope and peace for our troubled world! 'Set your mind on the kingdom before everything else and all else will be given to you as well' (Matt 6:33). And as John Main writes in *The Present Christ*,

The fact that we are, in our most real being, rooted in the silence of this centre seems to us the most elusive truth of our life. But the problem is our distractedness, our possessiveness. Our pilgrimage of meditation teaches us that in spirit and in truly we are there already, with our Father who has called us to be there, who created us to be there and who loves us to be there.

*Much love from Eileen*

## EDITORIAL by Stefan Reynolds



Many thanks to all who have contributed to this newsletter. It has been a strange year for us all, very difficult for many. I feel, however, that monastic Oblation has become more meaningful at this time for all of us. It is as if the whole world has gone into being a monastery – everyone has

had to practice stability, and obedience (to the rules and advise) and has had more time than usual to focus on the

conversion of our lives. What seemed particular to us Oblates is now part of the practice of everyone. We were worried that monastic life had become irrelevant to the modern world when all of the sudden the world became one big monastery. So our Oblation, our conscious practice of stability, obedience and conversion of life, is all the more meaningful than ever. A sign maybe that there is a good way of approaching the difficult things in life. As St Benedict says in the Fourth Step of Humility:

*Humility is to be obedient under difficult, unfavourable, or even unjust conditions, our hearts quietly embrace suffering and endure it without weakening or seeking escape. For Scripture has it: 'Anyone who perseveres to the end will be saved' (Matt. 10:22), and again, 'Be brave of heart and rely on God' (Ps. 27:14). Another passage shows how the faithful must endure everything, even contradiction, for the sake of the Holy One, saying in the person of those who suffer, 'For your sake we are put to death continually; we are regarded as sheep for the slaughter' (Rom. 8:36, Ps. 44:22). They are so confident in their expectation of reward from God that they continue joyfully and say, 'But in all this we overcome because of Christ who so greatly loved us' (Rom. 8:37). Elsewhere Scripture says: 'O God, you have tested us, you have tried us as silver is tried by fire; you have led us into a snare, you have placed afflictions on our backs' (Ps. 66:10-11). Then, to show us that we ought to be under a prioress or an abbot, it adds: 'You have placed others over our heads' (Ps. 66:12)*

As Joan Chittister comments on this passage: "This is the degree of humility that calls for emotional stability, for holding on when things do not go our way, for withstanding the storms of life rather than having to flail and flail against the wind and, as a result, lose the opportunity to control ourselves when there is nothing else in life that we can control." Maybe this is the time to put this step of humility into practice – we have, infact, little choice not to – but we can do it consciously, for the conversion of our life and, as Benedict says here, "in the person of those who suffer."

*love from Stefan*



## ARTICLES

### **From Seeker to Oblate – an amazing Formation Journey!** by Janet Robbins,

UK Oblate Co-Ordinator

Over the past 18 months, I have taken on the role of supporting Seekers, Postulants and Mentors within our WCCM UK Oblate community.

I have travelled a long way in the past 18 months. I have been enormously supported by my fellow oblates on the UK and International Oblate Councils and all the wise oblates who are always there to support one another. And I have walked alongside so many Seekers who share their journeying in a way that uplifts and offers great hope for our community of love. It is growing in collective wisdom and is strengthened by those who are choosing to be of service to one another.

I am part of the newly formed UK Oblate Council (there are just 4 of us: Angela Gregson, Julia Williamson, Gilly Withers and myself) and we are under the guidance of Eileen Dutt (our International Oblate Coordinator). We are all working together to ensure that our community continues to grow and develop: indeed, to blossom and thrive!

Working with the support of mentors and the UK Oblate Council, I have been responding to an increasing number of enquiries, having one to one meetings with each of them and holding regular on line Gatherings, specifically for those in Formation. We are calling them Gatherings, so they are not confused with the regular on line meditations and oblate cell meetings. Of course, those in Formation are also made welcome at those meetings.

The on line Gatherings are an opportunity to meet with other Seekers and to spend time exploring the oblate journey and share in their experiences.

There are currently 85 members of the UK Oblate community. 16 of those are in Formation (Postulants and Novices) and we have another 14 new Seekers.

Seekers find their way from many connections. They may be familiar with St Benedict's rule, or are already a member of one of our local or online meditation groups. A very small number may be ordained and familiar with the Daily Prayers. But all are beginners, seeking. There is no urgency to create a rigid discipline at the very early stage of the journey. Of course, there is a discipline and a committed way of life, but that comes as the Seeker is received as a Postulant. For the Seeker, it is a time for

exploring, finding out, questioning, being supported. A time to let go of personal expectations and demands. It is a time of enquiry, exploration.

I often need to remind Seekers that our WCCM Oblate community is not exclusively Catholic; all Christian denominations are welcome.

If the journey leads the Seeker to be received as a Postulant, they are allocated mentors who will hopefully be with them throughout the journey towards full oblation. This is not time bound and as St Benedict would say, there is no urgency and nothing burdensome.

As a member of the International Oblate Council. I have helped in the revision of an Oblate Guide that will help all National Oblate Communities to ensure that we build a framework, enabling the Oblate community to grow and thrive. Within the Guide is a section on Mentoring.

Mentoring is a particular ministry for Oblates and is part of the commitment to share in the work of the community. More importantly, however, it is an opportunity for Oblates to continue their own formation; to touch into and refresh their own sense of 'call' to the oblate path while accompanying a newcomer. Every effort is made to match mentor and Seeker and if this works well for both, they will journey together through to Final Oblation. Many graces are received as opportunities for Stability, Obedience and Conversion present themselves in surprising ways to both parties.

Mentors are invaluable as 'listeners'. Through their own experience of meditation, living the Rule of St. Benedict and incorporating the spiritual practices, within their life situation, are able to act as a gentle guide on this path with careful attention.

The following are guidelines in discerning mentors for the WCCM International Oblate Community:

- The mentor will be an Oblate of WCCM and will have developed their own twice daily meditation practice, daily prayer and including Lectio Divina and reading the Rule of St Benedict.
- The mentor will listen with the ear of their heart, fully attending to the Seeker. The mentor's focus will be on the oblate journey. They will guide, gently challenge and be prepared to be challenged as part of their own oblate path. It will be a time of nourishment for both.
- The mentor will recommend and share relevant



reading material, providing an opportunity to discuss and explore meaning. A recommended reading list will be available for the Oblate and Seeker. Seekers will be invited to attend oblate cell meetings and retreats and join on line or local meditation groups.

- They will become a spiritual friend to the Seeker, recognising that we are in a community of love.



So, as we begin 2021, we are seeing a growth in our oblate community, not just the numbers of enquiries, but our own growth as individuals and as a community. We walk alongside one another, each reaching out to support one another and to offer a listening ear, listening with the ear of our hearts.

### The Rule's Word for Parenting: Keep Getting Up by Matt Reeves

(An oblate novice in Cleveland, Ohio, USA, anticipating final oblation in 2021)

A couple of years into our marriage, as we talked about having children, I confessed to my wife that I wasn't sure I wanted to be a father. "I'm afraid," I told her. "I don't think I'll love our kids well enough." Now the father of two teenage boys, I know how well founded were those fears. I truly don't--indeed, can't--love my sons "well enough." But I have also come to accept that my fear of failure in love is actually fear of life by grace. In this, the *Rule of St. Benedict* and oblate life with WCCM have been welcome guides.

The Rule begins, "Listen carefully, my son, to the master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is advice from a father who loves you." Family relationship is the guiding metaphor in the Rule for practicing the life of faith. The next few sentences reveal the master as clear eyed in what these relationships will entail: faithfulness as well as drifting, laborious obedience alongside slothful disobedience, a *battle* at the heart of which is "to give up your own will."

A gift of the Rule's to me as a parent has been probing, chastening illumination of my self-will, at the bottom of

which is often resistance to grace. How I wish to be a loving dad yet resist "[praying] to [God] most earnestly to bring [that] to perfection." How I lament my mistakes as though interior self-flagellation while forgetting that God "has already counted [me] as his [son]." Though the Rule hardly capitulates to mediocrity for what loving relationship entails, it assumes that falling and starting again will be the pattern of the obedience.

"Let us get up then," the Prologue enjoins. "Let us open our eyes to the light that comes from God." My saying the mantra, praying the office, and exposing my relationships to the light of the Rule, has helped me to fear my falling less and to more readily get up when I do.

About a year ago, as I walked our dog at the end of a particularly trying day for one of my sons, puzzling over what love might look like for the situation at hand, I checked my email on my phone to find Father Laurence's acceptance of my letter for final oblation. I consider this coincidence providential, a promise that the practiced life of oblation will be sufficient means for receiving whatever grace I need, as a dad, a husband, and simply a son.

The latter of which I increasingly receive as most important for all the rest--for me to live as a stumbling yet beloved son of God. To keep yielding myself, one repetition of the mantra at a time, one plea for help and assistance after another, to the God readier to pick me up and make me a lover again than I am to receive such grace.

But God does will that I receive it. Thus, the battle blessedly continues.

### The Joys of Keeping a Journal by Vincent Maire (NZ Oblate)

My first ever journal entry reads, "Arrived in London after 19-hour flight from Hong Kong." It was 20th November, 1973 and this entry records the second leg of a journey that had started in Auckland two days previously. I worked, studied and travelled around Europe for more than three years, filling up three journals with my adventures. When I returned to New Zealand in 1977, I found I missed the experience of recording what was going on in my life. So, in 1983 I reconnected, somewhat intermittently, with my journal. In 1992 I discovered a book called *Keeping a Spiritual Journal* which added a new and deeper dimension to my journal writing. The editor of this paperback, Edward

England, tasked ten keepers of spiritual journals to each write a chapter on why they maintain the discipline of the journal. One contributor wrote, "I like to connect journaling with journeying – the distance you can travel in one day. Journalling is a record of your spiritual travelling, your personal edging towards God."



Over the period 1997 to 2004 I lost interest in my journal. Yet when I returned to the practice, I discovered that this time of being in a spiritual desert had, in fact, been a time of healing and growing in self-knowledge. Within months I was recording what is perhaps the most significant moment in my spiritual journey, my introduction to meditation in the Christian tradition.

I connect with my journal two or three times a month. I buy journals with good quality paper and always use a fountain pen. I enjoy the tactile touch of writing with my Waterman. I write about what is going on in my life: the people and events, experiences and activities, work, play, family, books, trips away, world happenings, etc. Naturally, Covid-19 is a frequent topic in my 2020 journal. On 1st April, I recorded 859,825 cases and 42,341 deaths globally. On 22nd December I noted 77.4 million cases and 1.7 million deaths. Ironically, when I purchased my current journal, the only one I could find had a black cover. At the time I hoped this wasn't ominous in some way – seems it was.

Here are the important reasons why I keep a journal.

As we age, we can't hold and recall memories. Our hard drive goes into overload. Re-reading a journal brings back people, events, experiences, both happy and sad. We relive them, reflect on them, give thanks for them.

My journals tell me that I have led a very ordinary life, some would say quite a boring life. Yet my journals also show that my life has been extraordinary, flecked with the presence and love of God, a life filled with

wonderful, loving people and amazing experiences.

After a few years of keeping a journal I made a remarkable discovery. If I had a heart-felt desire for something, if that desire was orientated towards God and the greater good, then invariably it happened. Sometimes the wait was 20-years, but my journals show me that I needed those 20 years to learn something very important, to grow in some way, before that desire could be realised.

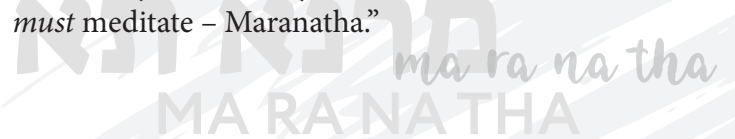
My journal is where I give thanks to God for this incredible life I have been gifted. I have made gratitude an important part of my spiritual practice. Indeed, a wisdom teacher once wrote that the only way to blackmail God is to give thanks, and God immediately feels obliged to give you further blessings. I have found this to be true.

Yes, my life has had its struggles and challenges. But my journals show that I found, always with God's help, a way through these winter seasons. God's presence was mostly found in those people who walked with me during those dark times. My journal is a record of the growth that comes from life's difficulties.

My journal is where I celebrate important people in my life. Over the past eight years I have recorded the birth of three granddaughters. What an absolute joy it is to write about family occasions and celebrate important milestones.

There are times when I feel it appropriate to commend someone to God. I know that God is with us at all times, but for people who are suffering, I am convinced that a journal entry is a powerful form of intercessory prayer.

Above all, my journals chronicle my "personal edging towards God." Those significant moments in my relationship with Jesus, our holidays (retreats) together, those tiny miracles that daily magnify his presence and need to be celebrated and remembered. Mostly I journal before Vespers and evening meditation. So, after another session of wonderment by writing, I invariably end each journal entry with these words: "And now I *must* meditate – Maranatha."



### Reading «Spiritual Friendship» by Aelred of Rievaulx Nick Polaschek

Reading the text *On Spiritual Friendship*, written by an English monk in the 12th century based on a pagan text from the first century BC, as a layperson living early



in the 21st century in New Zealand is an interesting experience.

Aelred was the Abbot of the Cistercian Abbey of Rievaulx in York from 1147 to 1167. He was an influential figure in the affairs of both the church and the kingdom of England. Living in the early decades of the Cistercian order (along with Bernard of Clairvaux and William of Thierry) he wrote several works, the most famous of which today is one of his last called *Spiritual Friendship*, written for his fellow monks. Ordered as a dialogue between Aelred and several other monks - a conversation between friends - it is based on a work that was very influential for Aelred as a young man written in the first century BC by the pagan Roman thinker Cicero called *Friendship*. Looking at the text from our perspective today, Aelred develops Cicero's thought in a Christian context, using his work extensively and also other ancient classical pagan literature, along with texts from St Ambrose and St Augustine from the 4th century, and examples and quotations from the scriptures. His text is exemplary in showing a Christian understanding being developed through a dialogue with other different forms of human wisdom outside Christianity.

The work is in three parts. The first is about the nature of friendship, the second about the benefits of friendship, the third about actually developing spiritual friendships. While the Gospel requires us as Christians to love everyone, including those whom we have no affection for, even our enemies, for Aelred (following Cicero), friendship is a special relationship with a particular person, based on mutual attraction, affection, shared thinking and a common spiritual orientation (1:32, 59; 2:57; 3:2-8, 83). It is not formally mandated in any way, but is a free commitment of equals to each other, carefully and thoughtfully entered into, and then persevered with whatever may happen in life, with forbearance and forgiveness where needed.

A friendship that is spiritual has a depth based on a shared commitment to Christ (1:8; 2:21, 27; 3:133). We need to move beyond immature (carnal, worldly) friendship that is self-interested towards true (spiritually oriented) friendship (1:38-45). Jesus himself affirms the centrality of friendship by calling his disciples no longer servants but friends (3:83), inviting them to selflessly lay down their lives for each other as friends as he does for them (2:33, 69). Aelred refers to Jesus' own special friendship with the apostle John, in contrast to Peter whom he designated as leader (3:117).

Aelred strongly emphasises the affective, experiential dimension of a spiritual friendship, often using the sensuous language of tasting and sweetness, several times quoting from the *Song of Songs*, talking of the spiritual kiss between friends (2:21, 26, 27). At one point in the text Aelred describes at great length two significant personal friendships he himself had with particular monks (3:119-127). Several recent writers consider that Aelred was gay in orientation.

Aelred views friendship as a natural gift of God, the highest of natural gifts (1:61; 2:49, 69). Its origin is in our creation - this potentiality for friendship is the way God made us to be. All beings from the inanimate, through vegetative and animal, to the human and angelic are, in their own way, oriented to 'companionship in society with one another' (1:53-58). The final fulfilment of friendships is in Heaven - friendships, as the epitome of the human, continue into eternity (1:21; 2:9; 3:44). Thus, Aelred shows our holiness and our divine fulfilment as being built on our God-given humanity, specifically our capacity for personal relationships. This gives an inherent value to the human relationship of friendship, as being itself God-given and thus a way to God, finally an aspect of life in God (1:61; 3:79, 134).

Recognizing distinctive friendships between individual monks and affirming them as positively contributing in their life journey toward God, Aelred's analysis points towards the same potentiality for those living a vocation other than the monastic, in relationships among lay people. Examples he cites, starting with first human couple (1:57), exemplify this. While Aelred is clear such friendship among monks has no explicit erotic dimension because of their monastic commitment to celibacy, his text refers to this dimension within friendships among married people (1:65, 66; 2:24).

For us today a key insight in this text is Aelred's affirmation that human friendship (even though it can be distorted by human evil) is by its nature God-given, godly, reflecting the divine intention for humanity. In contrast to other traditional views, such as that of Augustine, for whom human relationships are naturally in competition with God, and only of value if explicitly subject to Christ, for Aelred human friendship, as divinely intended, is actually our way to God (see Dutton 2010:30). Through the love of our friends we come to love God (1:58). Thus, Aelred's text reminds us that all of our personal relationships are intended to

help lead us towards fulfilment with God, but also of the unique value of any friendships we do have which have an explicitly spiritual dimension.

Part of Aelred's text of *On spiritual friendship* is presented in the excellent anthology, *The Cistercian world: monastic writings in the 12th century* published by Penguin (1993). A recent excellent full translation is by Lawrence Braceland SJ edited by Marsha Dutton published by Liturgical Press (2010).

### **The Ego & Self-transcendence by Maria & Albert Zakharovy (Ukraine/Russia NOC)**



The practice of meditation and daily life based on the Benedictine Rule are very similar. Both are like an art in which we develop skill, rather than a duty imposed on us from the outside. And if, in our understanding of meditation and the Benedictine spirituality, we move away from such a vision we will lose touch with the true nature of these ways of life. Recently, holding a formation course for community members from Ukraine and Russia, we discussed the question of what is the main motivation for doing meditation. And we found an answer: «We meditate because... each of us has a natural instinct to return to reality from illusions». The experience of practice, as well as the study of the monastic, desert and Benedictine roots of meditation, led us and our students to this answer.

We all remember that it was a natural need that led us to the discipline of meditation - like the desire to quench our thirst, or wake up in the morning after a long night's sleep. The same need, at different times, led people to search for an organized spiritual life in community - today we call this the monastic vocation. As in the parable of the prodigal son, we «come to ourselves» - we remember «about our true self», from which we have moved away in our «journey into a far country» of life illusions. And now, when the next budget put aside for the trip has come to an end, we begin to return home.

Sooner or later we get tired of social role-play games and of shallow living in a confused state of mind. The time has come to reconnect with the depth in ourselves. This is where our meditation practice begins, as well as the Benedictine Rule: «*Listen carefully... by the labour of obedience you may return to God*».

When we begin to meditate we very quickly encounter an inner conflict. Attention is scattered and we are distracted from repetition of the mantra. First, we can look for the root of the obstacles outside ourselves - too hot, too noisy, the cushion is too hard, the wrong mantra. But to think that there are many obstacles and they are outside of us is like not seeing the forest for the trees, we miss the main thing. Over time, people begin to successfully meditate in the most incredible conditions for beginners - in the subway at rush hour in the centre of a large noisy metropolis. If we maintain silence and mindfulness inside, outside noises cease to be a distraction. Sooner or later we will realize that the main obstacle is within us. This is the conflict between our ego and reality («our deep true self», by which God knows us). And in meditation, this conflict is overcome by returning to the discipline of repeating the word. We are taught this by John Cassian and John Main: «*repeat your word in prosperity and in adversity*», «*restricting the mind to the poverty of the one word*». It is at this moment we begin to practice Benedictine «labour of obedience» - like Christ, we «submit ourselves to the wisdom of Another». To be successful in this practice we need to learn «*not to do our own will, but the will of the God*» (RB, The second step of humility).

So, what prevents us from meditation and the path of the Benedictine Oblates is within us. We might even say that this obstacle is ourselves. Rather, that part of us that is at odds with reality. Our inner nature is unity and integrity, but our attention can be shattered - but then, reunited. When we look inattentively at ourselves, at others, and at the world around us, we notice only fragments of reality and we combine from them an illusory image of the world and of ourselves. This image becomes an idol for us. Such idols may appear externally real, but as Scripture says, «neither is there any breath in their mouths». And as long as we are focused on this imitation of reality, Reality itself is ignored. A conflict grows between us and Reality; our Ego becomes the operator of this conflict.

What does this word, the Ego, mean in the context of our practice and our perception of ourselves? The



Ego denotes an active and organized part of the psyche, which defines itself as «I», at the same time separating itself from «other Is» and building strategies for relationships with these «others». As a computer, the Ego calculates how exactly in each particular situation we can satisfy our needs when faced with «others» who also have these needs. The Ego is a mediator and a transitional form in the development of the psyche from the blind unconscious to the to more mature levels of our individual consciousness, which has a conscience, ideals and developed self-control. Often in connection with meditation, the Ego is understood as something that needs to be weakened or eliminated (or even worse, destroyed). This can lead us astray from the correct understanding of the practice of meditation. A healthy «I» capable of realizing and perceiving reality beyond itself. In meditation and in the Benedictine spiritual life, our active self returns to a healthy state in which it no longer overrides God and «others». The discipline of meditation and the Rule returns the Ego to its right place, giving it a clear task – to focus on the word and return to repetition, focus on community life and return to the will of God. In Chapter 31 St. Benedict simply and practically describes the image of a healthy Ego. This is the monastery's cellarer, who keeps the household in balance, takes care of the bodily needs of each member of the community, and most importantly sees all the usual objects in the monastery enveloped in the radiance of the Divine presence: *«he perceives all the utensils of the monastery as if they were the sacred vessels of the altar»*. This experience was described by a Benedictine monk Fr. Henri Le Saux OSB (Swami Abhishiktananda) who spent years in silent meditation in the mountains of South India, in his book «Prayer»: *«An enlightened person continues to see that the grass is green and the sky is blue, he continues to eat rice and wear clothes. Enlightenment frees a person from attachment to his or her ego. Now he sees all things as themselves, and not in connection with ego.»*

In theology we also use the term Ego. This concept describes those spiritual states where we stand in the middle of the path of development and are limited by our own ideas, our own forces. St. Paul uses paired concepts, describing our states before and after spiritual transformation - «flesh» and «spirit», «old» and «new», the «outer» man and «internal» person. While we live at the level of the Ego we are like Adam and Eve - separated humanity and life energy - wandering alone

outside Paradise, that is Oneness with God. Moving beyond the Ego we enter a continuous movement of growth and expansion, allowing God to act in ourselves. A developed and mature Ego is always ready to overstep itself, losing itself and finding itself again - just like each of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity eternally goes beyond itself to the Other in the communion of love. And finally, how exactly can we begin to resolve the conflict between Ego and Reality? How can we begin to return home - to unity with the One from Whom we fell away? Benedictine spirituality, like the great spiritual traditions, opens the path of discipline for us. Discipline is the main tool of any spiritual tradition as it leads to the experience of being in the Presence - quietly and attentively staying in the «here and now» which is the place and time of the Divine Presence.

*To be continued... Read the sequel of this article in the next issue of Via Vitae!*

### My way to home – to community by Iryna Kokovska (Ukrainian oblate postulant)



*«In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.» (Isa 30:15)*

Our WCCM meditation group in Lviv has been meeting for five years already. Perhaps this is not such a long period, but it is quite tangible. Many of the participants of our meditation meetings are surprised that so much time has passed, because every time we meet for meditation together, we get the experience of another dimension of reality, touching silence and Presence that exceeds our understanding.

The image of the path as a definition of our meditative pilgrimage is very clear to me. The road can be long or short, but one thing we know for sure: to move along it, you need to take small steps every day.

Amazingly, on my life's journey, the Lord opened up certain opportunities in His time, and this did not exactly coincide with my ideas about how and when this was to

happen. I got my first deep experience of contemplative prayer when I was quite an adult, when I deliberately chose the path of a “practicing Christian” and, staying in it for a certain time, made all the beginner’s mistakes in faith. The neophyte’s zeal crashed against the waves of the burning reality of my limitations, imperfections that did not correspond at all to the image of an ideal Christian. This ultimately turned my soul into a dry and waterless land, blown by the winds from all directions. It was then that I accidentally got on a retreat to the Jesuit fathers and got acquainted with the method of Ignatian meditation. Silence and reflections on the Holy Scriptures and God’s action in my own story opened a new page in my relationship with God.

However, I was still very focused on myself and was saddened to realize that this was interfering with my prayer and my life. But advice like “to stand in the truth” and “not to think about yourself” did not help much, because they did not answer the question: “How to do this?”. That was when I first heard about christian meditation in the tradition of John Main. I began to practice at home, twice a day, according to the advice from the Ukrainian WCCM site. In 2015, I attended a meeting with fr. Laurence in Lviv, which strengthened my intention to continue practicing this prayer. And already in December, the first meeting of our Lviv meditation group took place. I will never forget this experience. When we, total strangers, completed our meditative session together, I had the impression that I had returned home. I was struck by this feeling, because I cannot boast of the experience of a safe, comfortable home, and I do not like to be surrounded by strangers... But my experience spoke quite clearly - I was at home.

The first years of our meetings were very special. I want to thank for them my guides in the community, Maria and Albert, who first of all shared their personal embodiment of the practice, as well as the experience, knowledge and advice that we, as beginners, really needed. The atmosphere of our first meetings really nurtured us, like seeds in the ground. The shared silence protected us and allowed the seeds of the word to fall into the space of the heart, amaze us, discovering something new in oneself and in the world.

Participation in the annual Meditatio meetings organized by the Polish community was also a special experience. The attentiveness and sensitivity of Polish meditators to each other, the openness of the common space and goodwill struck my heart and clearly

demonstrated how meditation creates the Community. As a shared experience of being in the Presence, gently, naturally and delicately opens people’s hearts to each other.

The mantra became Ariadne’s thread, which slowly led me out of the tangled passages of the inner tunnel and helped me not to lose faith and not to give up. Having walked more than one kilometer of the underworld, I was able to trust her and exhale. And then I fell in love with meditation, because I felt the embrace of the strong and gentle hands of the merciful Father, who ran out first to meet him, and I just had to return. And again. And again. Always come back. Home. The next challenge for me was faithfulness. It has become more difficult to maintain discipline after several years of practice. And that was a disappointment. But I wanted to continue and did not understand what was the obstacle in my path. What milestone on the way did I reach? So the fear of close relationships, the problem of trust and faith in oneself came to the surface: the question “who am I” remained unanswered. Ironically, at that moment, I was asked to reflect on the path of the Oblates. Some part of me willingly responded, because the path in the community was natural for me. And the other one categorically refused, because I am not worthy and cannot be either faithful, disciplined or useful in the ministry... For several more years it wandered and matured in me, along with the daily imperceptible work of the mantra. The frightening word “discipline” has been replaced by the word “discipleship”. And this was no longer met with resistance. To be with the Teacher, to look at Him... It was inspiring. And finally, I didn’t want to walk this path alone. Community helps to see. Choosing the path of the Postulant, I rediscover the need to root in God, like a branch in a vine, without unduly worrying about the time of fruit bearing. Every day, choosing to take the next step, I believe that ordinary small decisions, small denials and joys are what creates a shining everyday life today. I believe that the One Who knows me from the very beginning, Who created me mysteriously and woven me in the womb of my mother, Who Is, walks this path with me and knows where this path will lead.

**JULIAN OF NORWICH (1342-1429),  
lived through the Black Death pandemic in  
England, and is a Saint for our Times  
by Paul Harris (former Canadian WCCM NC)**



The Black Death, a viral pandemic in England and Europe in the 1300's, killed 50 million people, 60 percent of the population, and it is regarded as the greatest catastrophe in recorded history. It destroyed a higher proportion of the population than any other single historical event. The disease was carried by fleas and rats, and passed on from person to person. This devastating pandemic wiped out many towns, cities, hospitals and monasteries. Individuals usually only lived 23 days between contact and death. The Plague was particularly disastrous in 1346-1353, but returned time and time again through the 1300's.

We only know a little about Julian's early life in this dangerous environment. She was born in Norwich in 1342, and was probably schooled in a Benedictine monastery. In 1373 she got very ill at 31 years of age, and came close to death. A parish priest was called to give her the last rites, and it is recorded that her mother closed her eyelids in anticipation of her imminent death. In this near death state she experienced a series of 16 visions gazing at a crucifix held up by the priest. After her illness she subsequently wrote a short text about her unexpected recovery. And many years later Julian wrote a longer text outlining these visions and spiritual revelations during her illness, entitled *Revelations of Divine Love*. It is the first book in the English language known to have been written by a woman.

#### THE WARMTH, CLOSENESS, AND TENDERNESS OF GOD

Why does Julian appeal to us? One reason is that in her writings she brings refreshing optimism, and new insights into the nature of God, particularly the warmth, closeness, and tenderness of God. More importantly, Julian is one of the few medieval writers who says it is absolutely impossible that God could ever be angry at us, for as she says, «anger and friendship are two opposites». God, says Julian, is loving, gentle and kind, which is the opposite of angry. She states, «For I saw full well that whenever our Lord appears, peace reigns, and anger has no place. For I saw no anger in God, in short or in long term» She goes on to say that God's love is compassionate and never wrathful.

#### THOMAS MERTON ON JULIAN

So inspiring are Julian's insights, that the Trappist monk Thomas Merton, made this astonishing statement about her: Says Merton: «Julian is without doubt one of the most wonderful of all Christian voices. and she gets greater and greater in my eyes as I grow older. In

the old days I used to be crazy about St John of the Cross, but I would not exchange him for Julian if you gave me the world, and the Indies, and all the Spanish mystics rolled up in one bundle. I think that Julian of Norwich is with Newman, the greatest English theologian».



#### A MESSAGE OF JOYFUL OPTIMISM AND HOPE

In Julian's 14th century world of unrest and the black plague, a world not unlike our own current state, she speaks of a God of tenderness. a God of compassion and love. As the Dominican priest Conrad Pepler once said, «we need her message of joyful optimism and hope, when we are in danger of being crushed under a lethal pessimism». God's love rings down through the centuries in Julian's revelations when the Lord says to her, «But all things shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well». Her revelations encompass a wide range of topics, and portray an unquenchable optimism regarding God's power to bring good out of evil."

#### JOHN MAIN AND JULIAN

In one of her revelations Julian says, «For in the human soul is God's true dwelling,» and adds, «utterly at home he lives in us forever». Again she says, «God is the still point at my centre». John Main, the Benedictine teacher of Christian Meditation and contemplative prayer, picked up on this saying of Julian's, and in one of his talks says, «Meditation is a daily pilgrimage to our own centre».

Once in a time of prayer, Julian heard these words of the Lord, «I am the foundation of your praying». These words were a great consolation to her in her practice of inner prayer. Is it any wonder that John Main asked to hear readings by Julian in the last days of his life?

#### ALL BELIEVING PRAYER IS PRECIOUS TO ME

As one might expect, God speaks to Julian about desolation and helplessness in our daily life of prayer and the need for perseverance. She says: «our prayer brings great joy and gladness to our Lord. He wants it and awaits it. So He says this: «Pray inwardly, even though you find no joy in it. For it does good, though you feel nothing, see nothing, yes, even though you think

u be well

you cannot pray. For when you are dry and empty, sick and weak, your prayer pleases me, though there is not enough to please you. All believing prayer is precious to me». No wonder John main loved Julian, studied her revelations, and chose to listen to her writings of optimism and hope as he approached death. Two of Julian's more famous quotations are «Utterly at home, he lives in us forever», and: «Our faith is to receive the divine ground of our being».

#### JULIAN BECOMES AN ANCHORITE IN NORWICH

In approximately 1394 Julian became an anchorite in Norwich, England, enclosed in a small cell attached to the church now known as the Church of St Julian. This small anchorage of about 100 square feet would have had a window looking into the church, as well as a window looking out to the street. The window to the Church would allow her to receive the daily Eucharist at the Church Mass. The window to the street would allow daily spiritual counselling to visitors, and donations of food and heat for her daily needs. She would also have a small garden. In her anchorage Julian wrote a book on contemplative prayer, as well as other spiritual writings. She was still alive in her anchorage in 1429, and lived until she was 87.

She had lived through her time of pandemic, taught about perseverance in prayer, fought the good fight, and is a saint for our times.

### Sea-ing a World I Could Live In by Mayang Sison Pascual (WCCM Philippines)

For a person who has enjoyed the water since childhood, I never dreamt I would one day try out the last frontier which is scuba diving. I felt it was just too risky to venture into the unknown and had no intention to be mangled and gobbled up by a giant fish.



But an unexpected opportunity presented itself

on my 37th birthday. Benson Dacay, an exporter of a seaweed extract, invited my husband Ruben and me to fly down south where we sailed off to a wondrous island-reef called Balicasag in Bohol. By morning, we were snorkeling along the shoreline when a man appeared from nowhere and asked if we wanted to learn to scuba dive. This man turned out to be Benson Dacay's scuba diving instructor who was with us all along onboard the ship. The master diver gave Ruben and me rudimentary instructions on how to breathe underwater and use scuba diving gear.

Of course Ruben and I were excited and yet a bit anxious about what we might find underneath the seemingly calm azure waters of Balicasag. However, the prospect of exploring that mysterious underwater world was intriguing enough for me to banish all caution to the wind.

The warm waters became chilly as we dove into this wonderland - coral beds full of tiny fishes sashaying hither and thither, and swaying shimmering anemones embedded on sand and rocks like a multitude of floral bouquets. To my surprise, we found ourselves at the end of this shallow platform and on the very edge of a submerged cliff! As we descended into the depths, I saw the enormity of this most enchanting terrain. We glided down beside nature's awesome rock face, a formation which brought us to view below its disappearing bottom, a vast nothingness at its depth. The cold water brought more chills down my spine as I peered into that mysterious black hole.

Where the sun's rays could still penetrate the water, we saw the cliff teeming with colourful corals and sea creatures. They played hide and seek — the parrot, surgeon, trigger, lion, leopard, and angel fishes. We were mesmerised by this underwater ballet— only these 'ballerinas' donned diaphanous dorsal fins and luminescent scales instead of tutus and pointe shoes.

When we were about to turn away from the reef, a school of tuna fish surrounded us, whirling and enveloping us as if we were in a womb. And even with all that movement going on, there was this strange silence, similar to that of an empty cathedral, with only the sound of my breathing and soft air bubbles escaping.

I was in a state of awe - grateful for this monumental experience of diving into that marvellous, rarely seen world. I felt my being embraced by this body of water, deeply connected to this ethereal world and all that it held. I was thankful, lightheaded and giddy because



of this singular, sense-stimulating adventure. I can only gush over this experience as an unforgettable and undeserved gift from the Almighty.

Looking back, I am glad I accepted the diver's invitation, like when I was first invited to meditate. The difference is, I get to experience this other invisible 'world' not only once, but on a daily basis; to venture into this mysterious silence amidst the cacophony of my everyday life. The colours, the movement and ballet dancing fishes are but our thoughts, feelings and images that we have to actually go through while meditating, albeit pleasant and entertaining. It is so tempting to linger, even set camp there...

Yet still, we must continue to dive deeper into this dark unknown place to find that precious PEARL of great price, paid for by our perseverance and obedience. We can find the HIDDEN TREASURE within us if we continue within this unfamiliar path, where the Kingdom of God resides. I just need to be still and simply be disposed to this sacred silence, so I can deeply listen and empty myself into nothingness. In doing so, I can come into the fullness of God's grace and love. My extraordinary 37th birthday, played out all over again at the present moment in the ordinariness of my days.

### **Birthday Gift by Jane Hole (NZ Oblate)**

Every fortnight, we in New Zealand take it in turns for one of the forty members of our Oblate Community to write an 'Epistle' to all the others about . . . about anything we like really. It's a way (given to us a few years ago by our former National Oblate Coordinator, Hugh McLaughlin) of getting to know one another and of sharing our experience of days lived in the company of St Benedict. Last September I wrote:

Dear Fellow Oblates,

I think of you all with great affection, so grateful for our community of love.

I've become aware lately that Benedict has moved from being within the covers of my much-handled copy of his Rule, and has started to walk with me through my days, instructing me as we go. I suppose that's just what happens once you've done some time as an oblate. Here's an example. It was my birthday two days ago - just an ordinary birthday, but the number's getting up. If I want to find the wisdom that age is supposed to bring, I know I need to get working on it right now and I need to

listen to Benedict. One of my persistent un-wisdoms is to question my own quiet path when I'm faced with the gloriously careless, extravagantly generous ways of loved and respected friends and family. I feel so pale and slow beside them - am I really on the right path? The contrast was obvious on my birthday. As I unwrapped a present, the much-loved others who were watching sighed and fidgeted as I wound up the pieces of coloured ribbon (my fingers are a bit fumbly) and folded the wrapping paper looking at the bird and flower patterns. There were cries of 'Come ON. . . just open it!' But Benedict whispered 'You've missed a piece of blue ribbon under the chair. That could be useful to someone one day.'

At last I unwrapped the gift, but had difficulty getting it out of its box, held it upside down when I did (my sight's obviously not too sharp) and didn't quite grasp what it was. Someone pointed out, with kindly impatience, that it was a large bottle of French perfume. A bottle of perfume of that size and quality would be perfect, I thought, for a woman who went to the opera every night of the week and hosted fashionable daily lunch parties. I only venture beyond my Christchurch suburb a few times a month to see friends or go to a concert in the central city, and wondered whether the price of the perfume could instead have funded a laptop for a student in a city school. But an expectant family face across the room was looking at me with outrageous generosity, and Benedict reminded me quickly: 'For you and me, the principle "simple and appropriate and nothing more" serves us well. But those moved by God to give abundantly and without thought are excused from frugality - you need to read again the gospel story concerning this.'

I hugged the giver, and squirted the bottle around liberally. The room smelled amazing. I knew there would be mouths to feed around lunchtime and had made a batch of apple fritters (I generally make rather good ones). When I served them I noticed that - yes they were nice and light - but the insides were only just cooked. As I dispiritedly cleared away the plates, one with a half-eaten fritter left on it, Benedict pointed out to me firmly that if I hadn't been so confident of my prowess with the recipe and more patient in cooking it, things would have gone better with both me and the fritters. However, he insisted that I should make them again - soon, and with greater humility - and ask God for the grace to improve.

They were cheerfully noisy guests, and I was amazed

at all the passing impulses they felt moved to give voice to. Was this communication, or was it simply noise? My head began to ring. But I remembered that a good (and very un-Benedictine) friend of mine is never happier than when friends and family fill her home with just these sounds. I know she doesn't care what they're saying; she just rejoices in the happy noise of those she cares about.

Benedict and I both prefer a quieter life, and we grow better there. But Benedict is gradually teaching me respect for how different we all are, respect for the particular way I'm made, and respect for all the different ways people can express love.

When everyone had gone, I was exhausted. I wish didn't run out of energy so quickly these days, but I'm glad that I don't feel - as I once did - that whenever my energy's flowing I should be 'doing' all the time. 'Being' is just as interesting and satisfying, I'm learning, and can be surprisingly useful to others.

After the family left, I sat in the middle of the mess, staring into space and wondering what would recharge my batteries. A good strong cup of tea perhaps, or would the occasion perhaps even justify a small tot of something?

But Benedict spoke: 'Not until you've prayed Vespers' 'And' John Main added 'done your evening meditation.'

Oh well.

Looking back now, I think it was one of the happiest birthdays I've had.

NOC), about 30 people residing in about 8 countries participated: Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Paraguay, Spain, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela.



Hernán González Fredes from Chile and Laura Zabaleta from Argentina entered the Novitiate, and Margarita Basso Moreno from Argentina entered the Postulancy during Saturday the 12th, feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, patron saint of Latin America.

Laura did it during Lauds at the beginning of the retreat since she had problems with the internet due to the intense heat and the strong demand for electricity in her area, so we feared that it would be interrupted at midday, the time of the most intense heat. Hernán and Margarita had their ceremony during the midday prayer.

We also had a beautiful mass in honor of the Virgin on Saturday afternoon, celebrated by Fr. Patricio Lynch, an Argentine meditator priest, who gave us a beautiful and very moving homily. On Sunday we attended the Bonnevaux mass where Luis Hirán from Mexico made his Final Oblation, it was very touching.

We offered 4 talks with presentations: Silence and contemplation (Marina Müller, WCCM Argentina), Spirituality at home, the embrace of silence (Thomas and Klara Brunnhuber, oblates U.K., this with simultaneous translation into Spanish) on Saturday morning, Humility in the Rule of Saint Benedict (Mary Meyer, WCCM Paraguay) in the afternoon. On Sunday morning, Live the vows (or commitments) of the Oblate (Juanita Paez, WCCM Argentina).

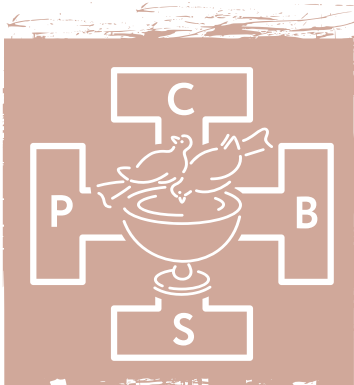
There were also three moments of physical activity: Ti chi by Hernán who is a teacher of this art, Conscious Breathing by Juanita who is a teacher of eutony, and yoga by Mary who is a yoga teacher.

Also three times of liturgical prayer and meditation plus two times of meditation during Masses. It was a very intense and at the same time very endearing retreat.

The attendants were very happy and also the organizers (Juanita, Mary and me). Elba Rodríguez

## NEWS

### First Latin American Oblate retreat December 12-13 2020 by Marina Müller (NOC Argentina)



This retreat was done for the first time and totally virtual, organized by two WCCM Oblates from Argentina (Marina Müller, NOC and Juana Paez) and one WCCM Oblate from Paraguay (Mary Meyer,



(WCCM Colombia) helped us a lot with technology. A very good and fruitful experience. Much interest arose in continuing to receive information and also participate in the Latin American Oblate weekly meditation group by attendants who are meditators – but not oblates.

### **The New Zealand Oblate Community** Report by Jo Ward (NOC New Zealand)

Make up of the NZ national oblate community: There are 42 in our community - 25 full oblates, (3 are over 90, several in their 80s, some are housebound), 16 novices, 1 postulant, 3 seekers.

#### **How we are connecting with our oblates:**

We have 5 Regional Cell Groups around NZ with each leader responsible to keep in touch with members in their group and set up regular meetings.

Twice a month, one of us writes an 'epistle' talking about what is going in our lives and/or what we are thinking or reading.

We've set up monthly zoom formation meetings for our new members. These have been taking place since August. The aim is for us to get to know each other better. A senior oblate in the community is sometimes invited to give a talk. 10-12 regularly attend.

We have mentor zoom meetings every 2-3 months. 7 attend those.

We have a NZ oblate newsletter sent out several times a year.

We've set up a WhatsApp group for those of us who feel isolated.

We have biennial oblate retreat.

If I happen to be travelling to other parts of NZ, I make it a priority to catch up face to face with those in our community.

#### **Our vision:**

To be a group that supports and encourages each other in living the Benedictine way.

To be a community of people that know each other.

To be a welcoming and hospitable community accepting of each other's idiosyncrasies.

To be a community of love.

### **OTHER NEWS:**

Rita McKenna has retired from leading the Cockfosters North London Oblate Cell group. Bridie Lowe will be assisting Philomena Phillips and Rita will continue to support of course.

[Philomenaphillips51@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:Philomenaphillips51@hotmail.co.uk),

Tel 07970 971674

### **Experience of Online Oblate Cell Groups:**

*Andrea Bruns from the UK writes:*

To every downside, there's an upside, and vice versa. Our monastery without walls, these precious WCCM pockets of pure silence, are one upside to the current world situation. Seems John Main's vision is indeed realized and zoom hadn't even been invented when he knew what was possible.

## OBITUARY



### **OBITUARY for PAM CONNOLLY R.I.P.** **3Rd December 1946 – 14th January 2021**

by Angela Gregson (UK Oblate)

Pam made her full Oblation @ the Monastery of Christ the King, Cockfosters December 2010. She fulfilled her commitment to share in the life and work of our Community: From the beginning of her joining WCCM, Pam was always an active member of the Community. In 2007 she became joint Regional Coordinator for the Yorkshire Region, and did a great deal to establish and build the Yorkshire Community into what it is today. Pam helped to organize retreats and quiet days, whilst leading her own meditation group in Harehills. She was also actively involved in setting up Fr. Laurence's first visit to Trinity and All Saints University

in Horsforth, Leeds. It was after Fr. Laurence's visit that the Yorkshire Region began to grow, with groups beginning to blossom all over Yorkshire.

She was Coordinator for The School of Meditation in the UK for about 18 months then her health made it impossible for her to continue.

She was deeply committed to our Community and was a regular attendee at the annual UK Conference, and facilitated a local meditation group.

She was a founder member of the Northern Cell which meets in Leeds, and we will miss her presence and thoughtful, heartfelt, sharing. Initially the Cell met at Pam and Peter's home and founder members have reflected: I used to love our Cell meetings at her house in Leeds, she would always make us feel so welcome. Pam would also be a supportive presence whenever we had gatherings at Cockfosters and I have very fond memories of her. She would greet me with a very warm welcome and hugs, hot coffee, and at lunchtime when we had a shared table Pam would offer homemade bread, soup and cakes.

As the Cell grew, we made the decision to hire a room in a church center and started to meet there. These are reflections from those days: I was so impressed by her engagement with the cell meetings and her very thoughtful and sincere contributions.

I felt her strong peaceful and generous presence each time she was there. May that inner peace accompany her through the next part of her journey.

She was a lovely person. I will keep her family in my heart and prayers.

She would often send me beautiful homemade cards of pressed flowers from her lovely garden. I treasure the love expressed through them.

I will miss her friendship which had grown over the years that we trod our Benedictine path together.

One year when Fr. Laurence came to Cockfoster's to lead his usual UK Advent day, Pam & I had travelled down by train from the East & West of the North and during the late morning it started to snow heavily and continued throughout the afternoon. We found the underground was still running so we were able to get back into central London to catch our respective trains home. We kept in touch by text messages, to see how we were each doing as far as trains still running. Pam texted me after about an hour that trains back to Leeds had stopped running and she was booking into a hotel for the night and trying again next day. I was more

fortunate, trains were still running on a very reduced service, but 4 hours later I did get back up North.

She looked forward to being with her Oblate Brothers and Sisters at our Annual UK Weekend and attended even when her health was deteriorating. She was deeply saddened when she wasn't able to do so in 2018 and 2019 because of her poor health.

Others who remember Pam have reflected that: She was such a friendly, open and warm-hearted person. A real advert for the effect of meditation. She was also very committed to the Community and always willing to help. It was a pleasure to know her.

It always felt good to be greeted by Pam with her beautiful smile coming from her beautiful soul.

Pam was a very warm and kind lady. When Pat & I travelled up to Leeds, in 2019, I think, for a UK Oblate Cell meeting, she willingly put us both up for the night, gave us a lovely evening meal and breakfast and met us at the station. It was lovely having that homely stopover, rather than going into a motel.

## POEMS



Valerie Quinlivan writes, "I am not an Oblate but have been accepted as a Postulant. After 25 years of being a member of the WCCM community, Fr Laurence's Contemplative Path has propelled me

towards the Oblates. The poems below I wrote as part of the weekly readings, accompanied by images, that I send out weekly to my local Meditation Group. We now have a monthly Zoom, but what has held us together is meditating individually at the same time, having previously reflected on the readings. The natural world has been an inspiration for all of us in this time. Almost always, the readings are taken from the many spiritual writings we draw on. This time I couldn't find anything that went with the image, so was moved to compose one!



## Autumn Reflections by Valerie Quinlivan

Let go, as the trees do.  
Let fall, even this image of autumn beauty.  
Free from the boughs of your mind  
thoughts and illusions.  
Be settled and still  
as leaves are, when they fall and merge  
enriching the silent earth.

### The Child by Valerie Quinlivan

Maybe the child  
does not know  
  
The trees are ablaze  
with your glory  
  
But she plays, catches leaves  
in delight,  
  
And romps in the mind  
of God.



## Monte Oliveto by Stefan Gillow Reynolds

Sentinelled by cypress and the silver olive groves  
between the sun-burnt earth and the blue domed sky  
stand the stones of a monastery six hundred years old.

Exposed on a hill to the sun, rain and wind  
it stands steady as the prayer that psalm by psalm  
build this house on a firm foundation of love.

That prayer now permeates the walls like light:  
Beauty in the slope of a hill, in the curve of a tree,

in the cobbled stones from gatehouse to monastery.

Winter has come and gone eight hundred times  
since this place was first marked for penitence.  
Eight hundred summers passed on bended knee.

What has been found? I ask. Prophets have been born  
out of silence as out of the labour pains of prayer  
and have left their mark on this holy place.

An incandescence on the hill shows that all will be well.  
If only a trace of sunlight or the flash of winter snow  
there is always a radiant glow on Monte Oliveto.

## Poems by Anne Marie Doecke

(Australian Oblate)

She couldn't help  
But notice an omission  
Our nightly prayer  
Half-finished  
Divine assistance called upon  
Be with our loved ones  
Everywhere

In her quiet voice  
She added  
And with the unloved  
And lonely  
For she herself had been there  
Compline now complete  
.....

Before evening  
Let us also feast together  
On the space between  
Our words and thoughts  
May we enjoy  
The table set before us  
Alive to mystery  
.....

A new path  
Discovered  
Not far From our home  
Almost thirty years  
Not realized  
It all began  
When I walked  
A different direction  
The unexpected  
Maybe always  
Lies close at hand  
.....

Graceful tree  
Silent and still  
Your limbs are spread  
Like an empty cup  
Able to receive  
What is being offered  
May we too  
Open our hearts  
To all that is eternal  
Deeper, longer, wider  
Than ourselves  
Able to drink  
From Your cup  
Of mercy and goodness  
For the sake  
Of all who pass by

**Poems by Mark Ball**  
(UK Oblate)

The first is a haiku I wrote during the JMS 2020, which I found really moving. I was reflecting on the place of the land in Maori identity, and on the formative landscapes in my own life. The poem's something about the Lake District and something about prayer.

**ONENESS**

brook tumbles busily down  
caught up in itself  
till stilled into lake's embrace

**LONGING**

*Inspired by John Main, 'Being on the Way': "Jesus tells us to seek so that we will find; ask so that we will receive. Matthew 7.7-1. The more you meditate, the more you realise that all the petitions that we can think of are already contained in the prayer of Jesus."*

prayer's  
a gift  
longing  
to be asked for  
to be given  
a treasure  
longing  
to be sought  
to be found  
a door  
longing  
to be knocked on  
to be opened  
prayer's  
a narrow gate  
longing  
to be squeezed through  
a tricky road

longing  
to be bravely trod  
prayer's  
an outstretched arm  
(or two)  
an empty tomb  
an open book  
longing  
to be read  
longing  
to be written

**GROWTH**

*Inspired by John Main, 'Moment of Christ': "In the vision proclaimed by Jesus each one of us is invited to understand the sacredness of our own being and life... that we should allow our spirit the space within which to expand... to see that spiritual growth is the highest priority for our time" and Mark 4.2-9*

So, a sower sows seed:  
some falls by the wayside, wasted - birdseed;  
some falls amongst stones, no room to root - shoots  
shrivelled up shoots;  
some falls for thorns, to ruin - fruitless;  
some falls  
deep  
in space  
in time  
and in  
silence  
begins to become

**BREATH**

*Inspired by John Main, 'Word Made Flesh': "Every one of us is summoned to the new, eternal level of reality called Spirit" and 2 Corinthians 3.17-18 and 4.6)*

Spirit breathes  
and breathing  
bears freedom to birth.

Unmasked  
we breathe of that breath,  
and bear Christ to birth,  
as darkness first breathed,  
and bore and birthed light.



## READINGS

### ST BRIDGET OF SWEDEN

(b.1303, d.1373)

#### Revelations from God 1:30.



*Now there ought to be three things in our heart, which is my dwelling: a bed where I can rest, a bench where I can sit and a lamp where I can get light. There ought to be a bed in your heart where you rest from lousy thoughts and desires and always contemplate eternal happiness. The bench is your desire to remain sitting beside me even if you go out sometimes. It is unnatural to stand all the time, but some stand all the time anyway and never sit beside me. The light from the lamp is your trust in me, that I am able to do everything and am in control of everything.*

From

### MARGERY KEMPE

(c.1373-c.1440)

#### Revelations from God 1:30.



*In meditation I heard the Lord say, "Which seems to you the better prayer, to pray with your heart or with your thoughts? When you pray with your thoughts you know what you ask me and you understand what I say to you. When you sit still and give your heart to meditation, then you will receive thoughts that God has put into your mind. I accept all your prayer whether you speak them, think in your heart, read, or listen to reading. Fasting, penance and saying the daily offices are good when you are learning to pray, and I accept any form of prayer gladly, but you are much closer to me when you sit quietly in meditation."*

An excerpt from

### JOHN MAIN OSB, "STABILITY" in *The Hunger for Depth and Meaning*, ed. Peter Ng (Singapore: Medio Media, 2007), 151.

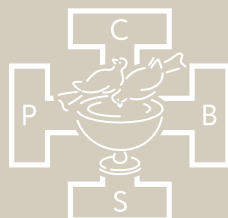
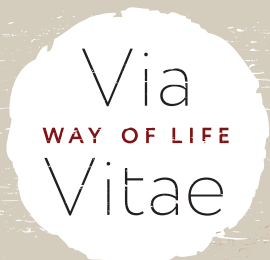


*We live in a world that makes great demands on most of us. Stress and strain take their toll on so many... In his Rule, St Benedict offers stability as one of the principal objectives of life. To be stable we need to be sure of ourselves. We need to be sure, confident, that we would not be blown away by the first storm winds that come up. [...] 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. At the same time, we discover our own fragility; we can so easily be tossed around by the storms of life. But also at the same time we discover our own extraordinary potential: to be one with the energy of God, with the power to expand our lives ourselves, into generosity, into love, into life, into eternal life, which is to say limitless life.*



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