

Via

WAY OF LIFE

Vitae

*Benedictine Oblates of
The World Community for
Christian Meditation*



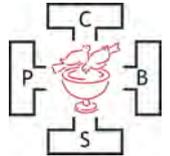
The figure of Mary is a central one in our understanding of Christmas. Above all, she is a great example of interiority with a direct meaning for each of us. Just as she carried the human Christ within her, so we must bear and worship Christ in our own hearts, remembering that He is just as truly present within us as He was bodily present in His mother.

John Main OSB

The World
Community
for Christian
Meditation



Benedictine Oblate Newsletter
No. 24, December 2018



A MESSAGE FROM LAURENCE FREEMAN

Every day I am surprised by the Rule. The Rule of St Benedict is an amazingly fresh document. It conveys a wisdom as deep as that of the gospel which is, of course, its inspiration.

The Prologue describes the vision and purpose of a life lived in community – living in obedience, stability and on-going conversion, re-balancing prayer work and study (spirit, body and mind) on a daily basis. The goal is to graduate from this ‘little school for beginners’ to the fullness of human potential. The rest of the Rule, however, is very down to earth – it is concerned with the physical and social aspects of the life such as food and drink, human conflict, travel, time management, clothing, receiving guests and caring for the young and old among us, because they are the most vulnerable. It is the way in which Benedict deals with these issues that make the Rule a wisdom document of such extraordinary depth, flexibility and universality. He never loses sight of the goal or the big picture. He doesn’t get lost in detail or overwhelmed by daily problems.

It is also why in Benedictine life – differently from other later tradition of religious life – we have just one Rule for men and women, for those living as monks and nuns and for those living as oblates. An Oblate Community is not a ‘third order’ but a new, integral manifestation of the original community. Today we see how the Oblate way of life has already become an important way of transmitting the wisdom of Benedict for a new generation in search of peace, harmony and meaning.

Bonnevaux is becoming a new manifestation of this and so I ask you to continue to hold it in your hearts and to plan to visit – on your own any time, or on pilgrimage with other oblates. The core community there living the Rule will be delighted to welcome you. You will find that you are at home.

We had a meeting recently of National Oblate Coordinators to help us as an Oblate Community see and steer our way into the future. We agreed to set up a Council for the WCCM Benedictine Oblate Community that will help us deepen and enrich the ways we live the Rule in all our different ways of life both for our good and the good of the world.

May Christmas be a wonderful and renewing celebration and may 2019 open for you new depths of peace and joy.

LETTER FROM EILEEN DUTT

International Oblate Coordinator



Dear Oblates and friends

I don't happen to think the Risen Christ promised to be quantitatively more present with two or three people than with one—or that he is present in a special way. But I am convinced he means that if I choose to live out my Christian life alone, there are great limitations to what God can say or do or be in my life... But if I have chosen to be accountable to a few people, to meet with them and talk about life as I see God unfolding it to me, then God has a chance to hold up a mirror and show me who I am. (Source unknown)

Belonging to, and actively being involved in the life of a community, is, or so I believe, in my DNA!

God placed me in a large Catholic family! At age 11 years I went off to boarding school where I stayed until it was time for me to leave but instead of leaving to take up a position in the wider world, I chose instead, like the fictional heroine of Charlotte Bronte's book *Jane Eyre*, to accept a position offered me at our sister school – my last paid employment was as parish pastoral assistant.

So in many ways my call to oblation didn't surprise me. The seed lay dormant within me for many years just waiting for me to nourish it with the right food. So began my search for a community where, 'all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them – and the Rock was Christ' (1 Cor. 10:4). After reading *Community of Love* by John Main OSB I knew that I had found my right spiritual path and wisdom teachers.

After making my Final Oblation I couldn't wait to serve the community and the Spirit was listening to my prayers – so began my journey as UK National Oblate Coordinator (NOC). I feel privileged to have been given the opportunity and that I received the grace of courage sufficient to take on the role in the first instance! I have received untold blessings throughout my time as NOC not richer than watching organic growth flourish within the community.

Life seen as a journey, an ascent, a pilgrimage, a road, is an idea as old as humanity. One of the earliest titles for Christians at the time of Acts was 'the people of the way'..... But we cannot think of life as a journey without accepting that it must involve change and growth. (Esther de Waal – *Seeking God*)

As Esther de Waal reminds us in the above quote life is a journey so I was not surprised when, earlier this year, I decided to speak to Fr Laurence about finding my successor – he agreed. I was delighted when, after a period of discernment, David McKenna said he would be happy to take it on and as

Christine his wife is also an oblate I feel that guided by the Spirit I have been able to place UK oblate community into good hands. David will bring a renewed energy and vision to the role and he is already reaching out to oblates encouraging them to share their gifts and talents.

And change during 2018 has not been restricted to UK as other national oblate communities have gone through changes. During the course of his visits to other countries during 2018, Fr Laurence has received the Final Promises of several new oblates each one, he reminds us, changes our community. Another change is that Imogen has stepped aside as NOC for France. We are deeply grateful to her for the time and love she has shared whilst in situ – for the time being Catherine Charriere has agreed to look after French inquiries (NOC contact list reflects this change).

The next Oblate Congress in Rome will take place in 2021. I was delighted when Elba agreed to take up a position on the International Planning Team – strong voice for our community.

And of course there have been many other changes some of which are covered in this issue by others – please make time to read it as Stefan has brought together a lovely issue, lovingly, for us.

May your Christmas Season be blessed with love, joy and peace,

Love Eileen

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EDITORIAL



Stefan Reynolds

Welcome to the Christmas Edition 2018 of *Via Vitae*. Not many pictures this time (as not many sent to me) but, as you will see, full of wonderful articles and events news. We are all keeping Bonnevaux in our prayers as building and reconstruction work is in progress. I bring your attention to a great new asset we have as WCCM Oblates,

'*Reflections on the Rule of St Benedict from Christian Meditators*', put together by Andrew McAlister from Meditatio House discussions, on two Websites theruleofbenedict.wordpress.com. Andrew has also many other relevant reflections on Meditation and community living on another webpage linesfromin-between.com. Both well worth regular visits. We will soon have our own home-grown WCCM commentary on the Rule.

Also can I recommend the talks of Fr Laurence at the North America Oblate retreat 2017 which are online. Laurence speaks of 'Silence in the Rule', on 'The Office of the Heart', 'The Word of God as an Event':

www.wccm.org/content/north-american-oblate-retreat-2017-listen-talks-laurence-freeman

Also, Humility in Science: A Benedictine Advice, three talks given by Marco Schorlemmer at the Meditatio Centre, in London. Marco is a scientific researcher but is able to explain scientific developments of recent times in a way that is easy to follow and fascinating. He is also a Benedictine Oblate of WCCM.

<https://soundcloud.com/wccm/humility-in-science-a-benedictine-advice-by-dr-marco-schorlemmer-101118>

Love and blessings for Christmas, from Stefan



David McKenna receiving a gift from Eileen Dutt to UK Oblate Community of a Benedictine Medal made of olive wood complete with stand.

Eileen received an embroidered framed copy of a Benedictine Medal loving stitched by Angela Gregson.

The handover took place within the Contemplative Eucharist celebrated by Fr Laurence during 2018 UK Oblate Day at Monastery of Christ our Saviour, Turvey.

Tinnitus Mary Lee, Bloom

I sit for centring prayer
at Mullaghmore Conference Centre:
*...no speech, no word, no voice is heard...*¹
an hour's contemplation.

As soon as the psalm is read,
wind resonates on the window panes,
punctuates the room's tranquility
while the tinnitus whistles in my ears.

The leader encourages:
everything In the human condition
is to be given a welcome during this hour.
I greet my round-the-clock tinnitus
with reserve.

It crescendos while other meanderings
compete for attention – so many
vie for my surrender.

...no speech, no word, no voice is heard...

my welcome guarded,
I long for its mellowing in my core.

¹ Psalm 19

ARTICLES

Is Oblation and the WCCM Oblate community relevant to contemporary spirituality?

by Giovanni Felicioni (Oblate UK & France)

“You did not choose me, I chose you.”

John 15:15-16

Last year I was reflecting on how my life was changing while helping with the Bonnevaux project; how the call to conversion and a deepening of faith was making itself felt very strongly so I asked Laurence and the Abbot of Monte Oliveto about renewing my Oblate vows. The Abbot said that this is possible after 21 years of Oblation. I looked up when I made my Oblation and discovered that it was 21 years ago! Below are some reflections on how the call to deepen conversion and faith may be felt as a need to connect and commit to a frame for offering of self (Oblation) and a sacramentalising of support (meditation, spiritual direction, lectio).

People today who live in the world, who have families and busy jobs and who are searching and have been meditating for some time are, more and more, feeling called to offer themselves to Christ. We see this, for example, in the rise of the number of people learning to meditate and also in those going on silent retreat, or those embarking on the long pilgrimage to Compostela.

They feel a specific, urgent and creative call to conversion and to a deepening of faith. They start meditating and as they do so they get to know a community and start to have questions about their faith and to need spiritual direction. The Oblate community of the WCCM has something to offer this type of person; and what is vital and new of our Oblate community is its very clear connection to a contemplative tradition that has deep roots in the monastic tradition going back to Benedict and further back to Cassian and the desert fathers and mothers.

Here is where St Benedict gives something to this type of person who is searching for a way of offering themselves — he gives the frame of Oblation with its way of life and the rule. John Main, a spiritual heir of Benedict, gives the same person, looking to offer themselves, the tool of Oblation with the simple teaching on meditation and a theology of the Present Christ.

Oblates make three promises.

First, we promise to be faithful will open hearts to conversion everyday. The tools of conversion are: meditation which opens up the reading of scripture (lectio) and a renewed relationship to the living sacraments.

Secondly, we promise to hope to be stable within a community of meditators, who are practicing. And here we discover the joy and freedom of stability on various levels: stable in saying the mantra, stable in practicing twice a day and stable in serving the community and receiving mercy and forgiveness from the community and as healing takes place being able to take this out into the world.

Thirdly, we promise to learn to love through obedience. This also comes on various levels: how to listen through contemplative practice; how to find and engage with spiritual direction from the meditation group or a chosen member of the oblate group or community at large. I was told by Laurence that John Main said that the two most important things were to meditate twice a day and to have spiritual friendship. A community of meditators offers both of these.

These three promises to which the love, goodness and mercy of Christ calls us are helpfully enlarged upon in the Rule of St Benedict for beginners. Even if this is an old text so much of it when read in small pieces on a regular basis is full of practical help and wisdom for finding balance, rhythm and moderation in a life that is on its way to being holy without knowing self consciously that it is doing so — this is called losing your life to gain it or the Paschal Mystery.

None of this will happen if we do not do the most important thing of all and that is to pray — to meditate regularly twice a day. And John Main says that this is the minimum. Without prayer, without meditation we do not begin on the road of discovering how loved we are because we cannot connect with the person of Jesus as crucified and resurrected — without prayer we don't know how to lose our life in order to gain it which is what Jesus wants of us — we do not know how to become free.

This is what so many people are searching for — a personal connection and a way — and it is our calling to reveal the ancient monastic tradition as a contemporary way of prayer; a contemporary way of conversion and a contemporary and vital way of faith full connection to the Person who has chosen us and loves us unconditionally.

For the Feast of St Benedict, July 11th 2018 by Polly Schofield, Canadian Oblate Coordinator

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Father John often talked about it with a great deal of passion – and having meditated for a while, we can confirm from personal experience that the stability that we so desperately seek, and long for – is within us. Indeed, this is the only stability, but it is unshakeable. To truly realize it, however, one must first come to know the reality of one's own poverty. It is not that some of us have so much, and others so very little. None of us have anything that has not been given as gift. Those things and ideas, we so desperately hold on to, are ephemeral, and under scrutiny, disappear. The tighter one grabs onto the little one has, the less there is to hold onto. Life is very similar to a banquet where platters of delicious things pass in front of us. We take this, sample that, from the platters as they are passed in succession. But the minute we try to hold on to the whole platter, the natural flow stops, and we extinguish all further possibilities. One must kiss the joy as it flies. If we let go of everything – everything becomes ALL POSSIBILITY – a perpetual surprise, as total gift.

"What does fullness need?" Father John asked - 'emptiness' he replied.

With much love, Polly

December 30 2017 Celebration of Fr John Main, was significant for Canadians because it marked the 40th anniversary of Father John's arrival in Montreal. By Polly Schofield (Coordinator of the Montreal Centre)

It was forty years ago that Dom John Main arrived in Montreal, with little more than what was in his heart – which was the absolute knowledge of the sustaining primacy of love. He came to open a monastery, and establish a community and to teach prayer in the Benedictine tradition to the people of Montreal.

Always ready for adventure, this for Father John was the one that life had prepared him for. For the five years or so that we knew him, Dom Main taught us to meditate – the prayer of the heart – the prayer of the Risen Christ – to recognize within ourselves and within one another.

Father John was himself transformed during those last years of his life – lived with such a sense of urgency – such passion, as he went deeper and deeper into silence – the one reality that does not cease to change.

One is made aware of this growth in his recorded talks, given on Monday and Tuesday evenings at the Priory, from the earliest ones to the sublime affirmations in the 'Last Conferences'.

As for so many as well as for me, Father John's dying was his greatest gift – his final and greatest adventure. This is what we are celebrating today.

Much water has flown under the bridge since those early years. Yet, one of the gifts of age is to clearly see how marvelously logical and meaningful a progression there is in life's events. What we did not see then, we see now.

To be here in this place, The Saint Anthony of Padua Centre and the former home of Unitas, is poignantly meaningful for me. It has come full circle, as if a gift, a pointer to the real meaning of things.

We owe a deep gratitude to Father Laurence Freeman, who sends love from Bere Island. We are grateful for his tireless work in taking the teaching of meditation to the ends of the world.

So, tonight let us celebrate our Teacher, who has left such an enduring legacy – a legacy that each of us must take to heart, make a way of life, and thus pass this tradition to our contemporaries.

If you want to really get to know Dom Main, and if you really want to learn how to meditate, listen to his talks. This is, as nowhere else, you will find the real teaching on Christian Meditation.

Do not embellish, do not complicate the teaching – keep yourself out of it. The 'naked intent' as the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* says is all you need. Do not proselytize, just say your mantra, and be a light in this world.

In meditation, in the forgetting of self, you will find that the Teacher, the Teaching and you are one.

The Contemplative Café will take place at Mount Melleray Abbey, Co. Wexford.

If you can, please join us.

Please direct any questions to

Fr Denis Luke, OCSO at +353 585 4404

CONTEMPLATIVE CAFÉ -- ADVENT REFLECTIONS:

- a) AN INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN MEDITATION,
- b) A TIME OF SILENCE,
- c) SCONES & TEA.

4pm on Saturday Dec 8th, 15th, 22nd.

Melleray Café

Led by Fr. Denis Luke O.C.S.O & Stefan Reynolds

ALL WELCOME

Reflections inspired by 'Let the Call Be Heard' by Joan Chittister OSB — Margrit Dahm, UK Oblate

The talk by Joan Chittister which she presented on the Fourth World Congress of Benedictine Oblates enabled me to reflect on the question: What, at this moment in time, is important for me as an oblate? What can be my contribution?

I immediately came to think of my family – this is where it starts: to foster love where there is disharmony, to be strong in the face of wrong and unjust accusations, not even to consider to retaliate hurtful remarks and unkind words spoken in anger, but to bear them with equanimity and forbearance, and to ask in my prayers for the kind of strength which relies on love being the guiding principle in every situation. Only

then are we able to forgive, but also to speak up should this be necessary.

For it is love and love alone which must not only rule family life, but also our encounters with our neighbours and friends, with the woman or the man behind the counter or in the queue, with the voice on the telephone and the sales personnel who serve you.

Love is always a gift: it is freely given, freely received and therefore freely passed on. It is this power, whether on the small scale of our families or on the bigger stage of the world which will make a difference and which we will be held accountable for. It is what makes us both human and children of God.

Reflection on the opening of Ch. 7 of St Benedict's Rule, 'On Humility' — Andrew McAlister, Australian Oblate

Sisters and brothers, divine scripture calls to us saying: "Whoever exalt themselves shall be humbled, and whoever humbles themselves shall be exalted" (Luke 14:11, 18:14). In saying this therefore, it shows us that every exaltation is a kind of pride, which the prophet indicates has been shunned, saying: "O God, my heart is not exalted; my eyes are not lifted up and I have not walked in the ways of the great nor gone after marvels beyond me" (Ps. 131:1). And why? "If I had not a humble spirit, but were exalted instead, then you would treat me like a weaned child on its mother's lap" (Ps. 131:2).

Accordingly, if we want to reach the highest summit of humility, if we desire to attain speedily that exaltation in heaven to which we climb by the humility of this present life, then by our ascending actions we must set up that ladder on which Jacob in a dream saw "angels descending and ascending" (Gen. 28:12). Without doubt, this descent and ascent can signify only that we descend by exaltation and ascend by humility. Now the ladder erected is our life on earth, and if we humble our hearts God will raise it to heaven. We may call our body and soul the sides of this ladder, into which our divine vocation has fitted the various steps of humility and discipline as we ascend.

Here Benedict speaks of exaltation as self-promotion. This kind of self-promotion has pride at its root. Pride is the reaction that springs from the ego's sense of identity and entitlement. Perhaps that promotion at work should have been yours and not your colleagues; perhaps that car space is yours, even if someone got it first; perhaps the attention given to someone else should be mine instead. Pride reflexively 'amps up', ready to defend, protect, and promote the self that somehow needs that promotion, that car space, the attention. Pride is the ego alternate to humility.

Is there a difference between self-promotion and self-expression? One seeks attention, the other does not. In Luke's

Gospel (14:7-11) Jesus tells a parable about choosing places at a wedding table. The self-promotor takes a place of honour. The one who is simply themselves is free within themselves to take the lowest place. There is a difference between exaltation as self-promotion and exaltation as gift. The gift is for the humble.

Sometimes, in community, how we see ourselves needs to change – regardless of what seat we have chosen, what role we think we should have. Someone who is living with others in a haughty way may find themselves lovingly overlooked. Another may be encouraged to live more confidently. It may be necessary, in love, to wean some off attention while giving attention to others.

Self-expression is about being in humble and confident touch with who we are and our vocational, or heart, direction. Self-promotion can be attention-seeking to ease insecurity, anger, pain, loneliness, injustice, a driven ambition. With healing comes humility.

A humble person has no need to self-promote. The humble are their deeper, true selves and this is enough. Living as this self is living with the idea of self-promotion forgotten. As we grow in humility pride loses its sting because egocentricity is being lost. This is ascending the ladder.

Yet contemporary culture sees self-promotion as normal. This is how we 'get-ahead'; it is how we get noticed. In a competitive and individualised environment, self-promotion is seen as necessary.

The spirit of the Rule would have us noticed as self-expression interacts with the needs at hand. This kind of noticing requires discernment: seeing what needs to be done and who has the gifts to help meet the need. And so, trust is an important part of communal life. As we grow in humility we grow in trusting others to see who we are and what we can offer.

So growing in humility requires courage. It is a courageous act, often in the face of pride, to shift attention from our unmet needs to the needs of community. And yet, paradoxically, this act can also be an act of self-love. Ordinary, everyday acts of gentle kindness are the best ways of beginning, and of continuing. Then, in time, with growing openness to the healing love within and around us, these acts of kindness become the ways we love ourselves as much as we love others. Saying good morning and saying the mantra become the same

thing; humble, attentive acts of kindness that have us focused less and less on ourselves while, at the same time, growing in the divine love-life of God. Humble self-expression is loving forgotten.

And all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. And God will exalt you in due time, if you humble yourselves under his mighty hand by casting all your cares on him because he cares for you. (1Pet 5:5b-7, NET).

EVENTS

New Zealand Oblate retreat January 2018

23 of the 28 New Zealand oblates attended the retreat at the Magnificat Community, Featherston. This year was one of the warmest summers in New Zealand for many years. The temperature was in the high twenties (85 degrees Fahrenheit) and very humid. The photo was taken on the one morning there was overnight rain which was a welcome relief. Two novices made their final oblation, two postulants became novice oblates and one enquirer began his journey as a postulant. It was a time of togetherness, of friendship, of mutual respect and love for one another in the Benedictine Oblate community.

(Hugh McLaughlin — National Oblate Coordinator, New Zealand)



Annual UK Oblate Day, Turvey Abbey October 14th 2018

The annual meeting with Father Laurence is always a special day when new people are welcomed and there is delight in meeting old friends. This year nearly 30 Oblates and friends came to support the new entrants to the novitiate, Breda McStay, Margaret Murphy and Philomena Philips in the morning, and in the afternoon, Stef Diaz as she made her final oblation.

Speaking to us all, Father Laurence began by reminding us of the teaching of John Main in 'Word into Silence' saying that we can, through our practice, liberate our potential and experience the love of God flooding through us. The Rule asks us to be both rooted and open to change. Through following its advice we are able to find our balance and move authentically towards others, heart to heart, knowing ourselves as persons created for an eternal destiny.

We continued our day with Taize chants, a Eucharist, an update on the ongoing development of our new international centre at Bonnevaux and we marked the occasion of Eileen Dutt's move from being our UK Oblate Coordinator. As a token of our appreciation, Angela Gregson presented Eileen

with a beautiful framed, hand-embroidered copy of the Benedictine medal. Eileen introduced, and we warmly welcomed, David McKenna as our new UK Oblate coordinator.

It was good to have Br. John and Br. Herbert with us for parts of the day; their generosity and kindness to us supports our own sense of being part of the Benedictine Community. For myself I left with a renewed sense of my ground and inspired by a feeling of purposeful change.

UK Oblate Day 28th July

Our meeting went well. One of the oblates who was with us wrote: "Yesterday was like water on parched grass to my soul."

We began with a prayer, asking for the blessing of the Holy Spirit. We agreed to hold in our hearts those who could not be with us, mentioning by name people who had sent us their blessing and others of our community who were in need of special prayers.

The one word that has stayed with me from the Lectio on the passage from the Rule of St Benedict which you will find in Charles's notes below is: cherish. I believe we are being called upon to cherish each other more.

Our sharing on Stability revealed a diversity of understanding. Many of the points raised were complementary and led to a richer overall view of the term and how we should apply it in our lives. Our reflection followed the lectio format, with each one saying in turn what they understood by Stability and then what it meant in their life now – without comment. Then each was invited to give the reason for what they had said, if they wanted to. A general discussion followed.

Because we spent more time over lunch than we had intended and had such an in-depth discussion on Stability we decided to leave Obedience and Conversion for another time. This allowed sufficient time for Elba's presentation which we all really enjoyed.

We then read the following extract from an article by Fr Laurence:

Quoting psalms and the Wisdom literature as he often does, Benedict identifies seeking God with the goal to human life. That life does not cease to be human and viable once the goal is being pursued. When the 'first fervour of conversion' wears off your brethren no longer seem saints or even your best friends. Stability then is one of the vows Benedict defines and requires both physical and mental perseverance. He would have enjoyed the rabbinical saying 'you are not obliged to succeed, but you are not allowed to give up.' But being Benedict, he knows that people will, and so gives the monk three strikes before he is out and not allowed to return.

We ended the day by using the shorter form of the office of Evening Prayer from the Benedictine Handbook which Susan had given us as a wedding present including another session of meditation after the Magnificat.

Charles's made notes during our meeting and he is happy to share these. They read as follows:

Everybody was asked to talk very briefly about what "Stability" meant for them. These are some of the views expressed:-

1. Something deep within me
2. A lack of perturbations
3. A good balance in my life
4. Stable relationships
5. A meaningful purpose
6. An Anchor

These in turn had various implications as follows:

1. The center of meaning in my life - leading to a fuller understanding of, for example, "married life"
2. A sense of proportion in dealing with other people

3. Learning to love not only God and other people, but also myself
4. Doing things for other people, leading to a sense of joy
5. Continuity of actions linked to a clear mission in life
6. Not a place or a community - but a true loyalty to God – from which everything else follows.

Predictably, this linked very neatly with our Lectio passage from the Rule of St Benedict. The passages we used were:

Don't get too involved in purely worldly affairs and count nothing more important than the love you should cherish for Christ. Don't let your actions be governed by anger nor nurse your anger against a future opportunity of indulging it. Don't harbour in your heart any trace of deceit nor pretend to be at peace with another when you are not; don't abandon the true standards of charity. Don't use oaths to make your point for fear of perjury but speak the truth with integrity of heart and tongue.

The first step of humility is to cherish at all times the sense of awe with which we should turn to God. It should drive forgetfulness away; it should keep our minds alive to all God's commandments.

In the afternoon Elba gave an excellent presentation regarding her own Oblate journey. She is a deep thinker and has a strongly scientific and analytical approach to such things – so she had spent a long time thinking about where she had come from – with some lovely illustrations of her own family background ; where she is now – which she had analysed in some depth; and where she is going. I think everybody was humbled by the amount of thought and effort she had put into not only the presentation, but also the BIG QUESTIONS in her life. It is difficult to summarise in a few words but some of the themes that clearly had importance for her journey centred around — Compassion; Objectivity; Coherence; The Present Moment.

In summary – mine not hers – it spoke to me about a balance between 'giving' and 'receiving' in both a religious and a non-religious sense.

Cockfosters' Oblate Cell Retreat, St Martha's Convent Rottingdean, May 2018

In addition to the annual one day retreat at St Gilda's Barnet, I thought we could embark on a four day Residential Retreat, it could take place in St Martha's Convent/ Guest house. St Martha's is set in Rottingdean, an historic village on the south coast. For many years this special place has been a spiritual oasis. Now I hoped to share all the good things about this venue with members of the cell. They enthusiastically welcomed the proposal.

Philomena was unable to join us. However Tess a meditator was happy to take her place.

Ideas for a program for the four days came flooding to mind. Personal reading of the Rule, communal practice of meditation. Morning and Evening prayer, the possibility of joining the community for the Eucharist. All this would create a good foundation for the Retreat. Adequate time and space would be essential for those taking part.

Knowing Rottingdean so intimately I would be able to suggest places worth a visit - the windmill high on a hill, walks along the coastal road and seafront, a visit to St Margaret's, an historic Anglican Church, with its Burne-Jones stained glass windows. Kipling Gardens with a variety of sheltered areas and nooks and crannies inviting to come and rest awhile, the peace and comfort of the well equipped courtyard and kitchen gardens at St Martha's and its special chapel.

Diana offered to lead a poetry evening and Bridie a demonstration of how to make St Bridget's crosses from reeds collected by her and her husband the night before leaving Cockfosters. I was yet to name a theme. Then the arrival of the *Meditatio* newsletter which included an inspirational letter from Fr Laurence. This provided me with the theme for the Retreat. "Equanimity Reveals Our Inner Capacity To Accept What Actually Is."

Shortly after arriving we set off to a local café to discuss the program and the theme. We left feeling energized and positive, yet before the close of the day I found myself leaning towards feelings of inadequacy. However, the early morning meditation and sharing my thoughts with members of the group helped to dispel the negativity.

Friday evening, following Evening Prayer and meditation, we prepared to listen to Diana recite chosen poems. Then "oops help" I thought, when she asked us to compose and recite a poem. There was an atmosphere of silent concentration. Then shrieks of excitement emerged as we completed the task.

Saturday evening was given to *Lectio Divina*, Rosemary selected the gospel for the following day – Pentecost. The following morning Diana and Bridie attended St Margaret's Anglican Church, while Rosemary and I went to the Catholic Parish Church. We arranged to meet after our respective celebrations to share thoughts and homilies and to enjoy our coffee in the cafe on the beach. It was wonderful to sit and admire the vast expanse of sea and the white cliffs under a clear blue sky. We each discovered something new during the four day retreat. Also I was aware of a deeper sense of community.

Pope Francis in his new Apostolic Exhortation "Gaudete et Exsultate" declares *The community that cherishes the little details of love, whose members care for one another and create an open evangelising*

environment is a place where the Risen Lord is present, sanctifying it in accordance with the Father's plan.

Rita McKenna

Our Oblate Retreat in Rottingdean taught me that there is a poet in everyone!! So here goes.

It was a joyful time full of
Love and sharing
Sea and silence
Being and fun
Poetry and Pimms
Sisters and simplicity
Gardens and gazing
Chapel and cliffs
Community and solitude.

Bridie Lowe

Australia, 2018 David's Place Retreat

For the last seven years, members of Sydney's 'David's Place Community' have made their way to St. Benedict's Monastery, near Arcadia (in Sydney's north west), for their annual retreat. Oblates from The World Community for Christian Meditation have been invited, each year, to support them.

What is David's Place?

David's place is an inner-city space where Sydney's homeless and marginalised can come to find friendship, peace, spiritual nourishment and connect with the wider community.

It was created to be a place where Jesus would have liked to hang out, where it doesn't matter if you're rich or poor, or where life has led you.

David's Place brings together both rich and poor, breaking down barriers in our city. Division in our communities is where many of our societal problems arise. To experience David's Place for yourself is to know that such separation is avoidable. (from davidsplace.com.au)

Jesus was not about class. Jesus was about the Kingdom, or Kingdom of God: places and ways of life that are about kindness, compassion, and just relations. Attempting Kingdom living can be a challenging way to operate. It often involves being with different people. This can reveal to us our tendencies toward fear in the face of difference. Division can be a product of this fear.

It is familiarity that breaks down uncertainty and fear. Community is the place where the stranger becomes familiar, where the stranger can then become a friend. David's Place is such a place.

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. (2Cor 4:7)

The clay jar of St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians is a great metaphor for the human condition. We are all jars of clay. In our psychology and physicality we are the stuff of the earth. Some jars have been mostly looked after, cared for; others have been neglected. Some jars have been shaped with weaknesses, fault lines in the clay that are just there. Some jars are stronger in their shape and can bear a load that other jars cannot.

This year's David's Place retreat was a time for us, as clay jars, to come away and rest. For many, the load of living in the inner-city was set aside; fault lines were eased.

The wonderful thing about being jars of clay is that the 'weaker' ones can remind the 'stronger' ones what we all carry: the treasure that is Christ. This is what happened at this year's retreat. Human acts of love and kindness revealed this treasure within: wheelchairs pushed through the mud and the rain; words of encouragement and love given amid challenging circumstance; concern voiced for those upset; inclusion valued above everything else; prayers of thanks and intercession offered; gratitude abounding; silence shared.

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. (2Cor 4:8-10)

Many at David's Place live with fragile clay. It bends, it cracks,

it can break. And so it can be with all of us. This year's retreat showed that fragile acts of love are the strongest acts; in their vulnerability they reveal the invincibility of divine love in human experience. Love is an extraordinary power that lives in us, waiting to move and act as us. Fragile clay is love's sacrament.

During the retreat our breaks and cracks were on display – we could not help it. And not being able to help it is the gift. In all this a treasure shines through that transfigures weakness into ways of love. This is what happens when fragile human beings dare to love each other. This is what happened at this year's David's Place Retreat.

For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you. (2Cor 4:11-12)

What can happen for us who accept something of the clay that they are, the jar we have become, and still together attempt love? We experience that this Jesus, this treasure of Christ within us, is mysteriously and somehow who we most deeply are. The humanity of Jesus is his solidarity with us. Being human is enough – whatever jar we are.

Each year, at St. Benedict's Monastery, the David's Place Community are their own human face of divine love for each other. This is what all community can be, both for each other and for the world.

POEMS

Per Ipsum

Through him, the crystal waterfall of love,
 Love tumbled down and bedded with the night.
 The dark-bellied void took shape, grew great, grew bright,
 With a million stars beneath, around, above.
 And a million million years crawled slowly by
 While sightless serpents slithered from the seas,
 Primeval fungi clung to fecund trees,
 And leathered lizards clawed the spore-clad sky.
 Then corn and wheat on every hill grew rife
 Wasting their golden grain upon the air.
 Feast for the finches, food for mice to share-
 The first faint promise of the bread of life.
 Then too, the first wet whisperings of wine
 Curled through the tender tendrils of the vine.

With him, the flowing millstream charged with life,
 We ride the current of our history,
 Now deep in mud, now steeped in mystery,
 Now reaching out in love, now locked in strife.
 But onward, onward, with the living stream
 Learning to walk, to talk, to handle fire,
 Wielding weapons, playing harp and lyre,
 We come to live together, work and dream.
 Pounding the whirling waterwheel with him
 The golden grain becomes the daily bread.
 We press the vineyards secrets, rich and red
 With him, find wisdom's source, grow strong of limb.
 And every meal we share and friendship given
 Consolidates communion with heaven.

In him, pacific depths of paradise
I sink to silence and eternity
And find such treasure in my poverty
No other peace or pleasure will suffice.
For praising him, who praises deep in me,
Creation swims within its mighty Lord,
The Father and the Spirit are adored
In waves of light, and joyous harmony.
And centuries long past, and yet to be
And cosmic corners long light years away
Meet in the banquet of his holy sway
A mystic moment in a mystic sea.
Oh eucharist of life, to Life succumb.
Maranatha, come Lord Jesus, come.

Aileen Urquhart, Oblate, Uk.

Aileen has recently had a children's nativity book published by Redemptorist Publications, called The Animals' Christmas. www.seriouslight.co.uk

Indwelt

Not only in the words you say,
Not only in your deeds confessed,
But in the most unconscious way
Is Christ expressed.
Is it a beatific smile,
A holy light upon your brow?
Oh, no! I felt his presence
When you laughed just now.

For me, 'twas not the truth you taught
To you so clear, to me so dim,
But when you came to me
You brought a sense of Him.
And from your eyes He beckons me,
And from your lips His love is shed,
Till I lose sight of you
And see the Christ instead.

Beatrice Clelland



READING

The journey into the God who is Love cannot be followed in isolation. We cannot pre-determine the itinerary of our pilgrimage or the conditions of our commitment. Indeed when we find ourselves planning our inner journey, steering a course so as to catch the sights on the way, it is a good sign that we have yet to take our hand off the wheel. We have yet to let the God-driven direction reveal itself. We have not

yet placed our centre of consciousness outside of ourselves. Community is the context in which we learn to do this. We learn directly about the truth and power of other-centredness. Fidelity to the community is our loving openness and freedom with others. It is the complement to our fidelity to the mantra. It is all about generous, magnanimous poverty of spirit. **John Main** (*Monastery Without Walls*)

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BOOK REVIEW

Fr Laurence Freeman on 'The Wisdom of Love in the Song of Songs' (Hikari Press, 2018), by Stefan Gillow Reynolds, selected as one of the 'Books of the Year' in *The Tablet*.

The Song of Songs is a beautifully enigmatic biblical text – St Augustine called it a “puzzle”, it is a poem that jumps alive in Stefan Gillow Reynolds’ close reading. A text usually met in fragments at weddings is presented here as a new whole in a fresh commentary with theological and psychological insight. Dream, erotic story or mystical revelation, or all three? The merging of the different forms of love yields new insight into the divine and human affair.

Review by Graeme Watson (UK meditation leader)

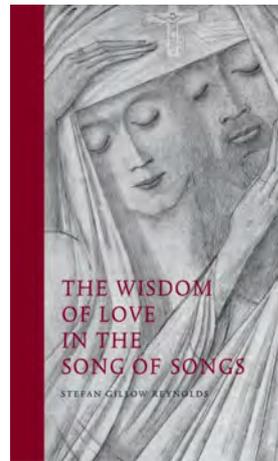
This is a book for all who are attracted or intrigued by the Song of Songs, not least for those who have found their way to the prayer of the heart. But there are obstacles to be overcome. An early Jewish scholar complained that the key to understanding the Song of Songs had been lost. St Augustine remarked that it is a puzzle. Not surprisingly, this biblical poem has been seen by many commentators, including myself, as elusive, fragmentary, almost like a sequence of dreams.

Dr Stefan Reynolds believes that he has found the key to the Song, and in my personal view he may have done just that.

In Part One, the author goes about the task of exploring the literal sense of the poem. This involves knowing about the social context of the royal court. He proposes that it is a story about a king (Solomon) who is in love with a beautiful and talented girl. The girl is a peasant, yet she meets the king on equal terms. The love story is a tragic one, because it was impossible then, as it has been at most times, for a woman, no matter how talented, beautiful and intelligent, of such humble background to marry a king. She could never hope to be other than a concubine, taking her turn to be summoned to the royal bed. But this girl refuses to be anything else than a lover and a beloved.

Reynolds believes that the Song, though set in the time of King Solomon (970-931 BCE), was probably written about 700 years later. So the poem is a work of imaginative fiction, based on the legend of Solomon, perhaps rather like Tennyson’s *Morte d’Arthur*, based on the legend of King Arthur. It is a book inspired by wisdom and by the legendary reputation of Solomon.

What is most remarkable about the girl in this poem is that, despite her humble background, she is in no way submissive, or subservient to her male royal lover. From the start of the poem she takes the initiative. In the author’s words, she is shown to be resourceful, emotionally intelligent, and guided by deep intuition. It is difficult, therefore, not to see her as personifying Wisdom, and this thought leads the reader very



easily to both the symbolic and the mystical meanings of the poem.

In Part Two, the author develops what he calls a Narrative–Spiritual Reading. His aim is to weave together the clear narrative context of the Song with its spiritual meaning. The poem, he believes, “is the record of the joyous and painful weaving together of spirit and flesh within two human lovers”.

One of his themes is that these two lovers become the abiding place of Wisdom. Another theme is the transcendence of spiritual beauty. Beauty is no mere appearance. It is both personal and interpersonal. Quoting Hans Von Balthasar and Dostoevsky (“the world will be saved by beauty”), and paraphrasing Pope John Paul II (“beauty lies in the love of the beholder”) Reynolds asserts that the love of beauty demands “as much courage and decision as the search for truth or the practice of goodness.” The significance of the loving gaze is a key to joyous and healthy living. Again, “to know we are beloved is to be empowered to look with the same love at others.” As Dom John Main often declared, we can only begin to enter into silent meditation when we truly know we are loved by God, and are therefore free to love God in return.

The poem almost ends with the two lovers in each others’ arms. “Many waters cannot quench love, nor floods (that is, the tears of separation) overwhelm it.” Although marriage is out of the question, and the lovers finally separate, yet the love between the pair continues to burn in their hearts. The girl he loves becomes Solomon’s inner guide, his teacher of Wisdom.

Part III of the book is concerned with the symbolic or mystical meaning. The author follows the brilliant teaching of the 3rd Century Origen, and the Christian mystics who believed that the Song had been divinely communicated to reveal how God relates to the human soul. The physically sensual and erotic language of the Song has its counterpart in the mutual longing of God and human personality. In this process, the mutual longing has to be heard, tasted, touched and inhaled by the inner spiritual senses, counterparts to our outer senses. “O taste and see how gracious the Lord is.”

The book is beautifully presented with black and white, and colour illustrations from a variety of sources, medieval, personal and contemporary, Western and Eastern. Specially notable are a set of paintings by the contemporary artist, Juliet Asher. There is a full index, bibliography, and timeline. This is a scholarly book, but it is also a good read, not least for meditators. It is written with passion and joy, out of the anvil of personal experience of suffering love.