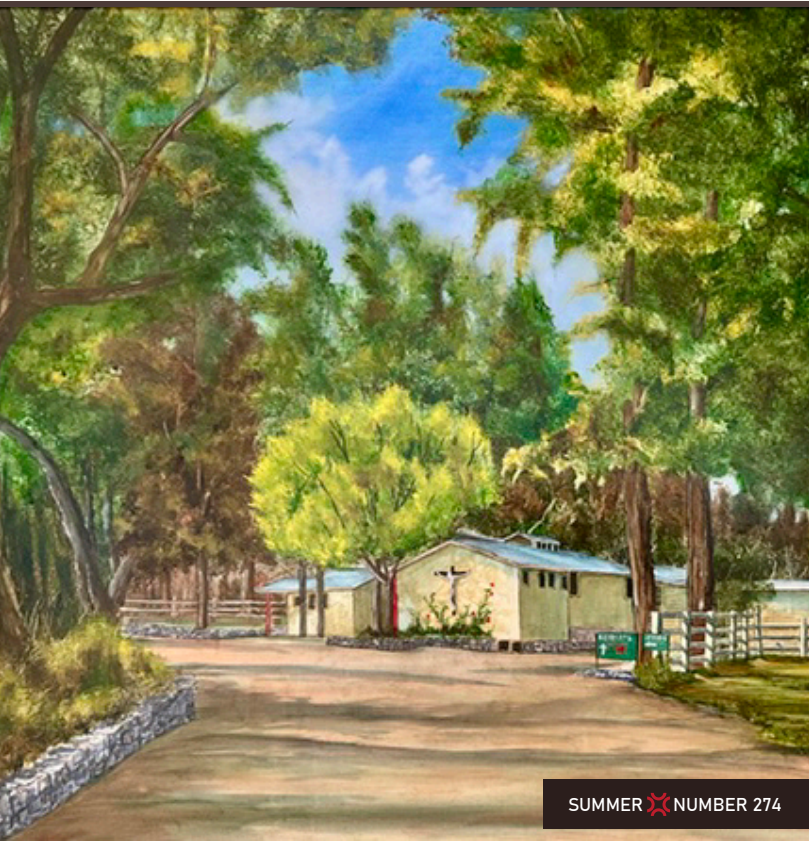
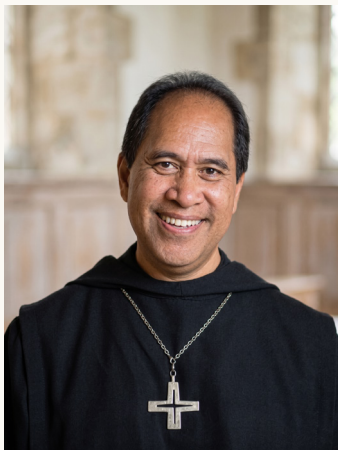


THE VALYERMO
CHRONICLE
Saint Andrew's Abbey



SUMMER  NUMBER 274



LETTER FROM THE ABBOT

During a weekday Mass last week, among the thirty or so people in attendance was a young mother with her child, who looked to be about two or three years old. At the beginning of Mass, the child made the usual sounds of a toddler—noticeable but not distracting. Gradually, those sounds grew louder until they became cries. By the time of the elevation of the Host, when the priest held up the Eucharist for all to see and adore, the cries had turned into full-fledged wails. The

mother quietly carried her child outside, where the crying continued for another ten minutes. Even from outside the church, the child's cries could still be heard.

As I listened, I found myself thinking, *Poor child. Poor mother.* What struck me was the contrast between two events happening at the very same moment: outside, a mother comforting her inconsolable child; inside, Jesus Christ truly present in the Eucharist, lifted high before the congregation. I wondered, *If Jesus is here, why is the child still crying? Why is the mother still struggling?*

The answer came gently but clearly.

Although the Lord entered our world and conquered sin and death through His Passion, Death, and Resurrection, He did not eliminate every hardship of earthly life. Babies still cry. People still go hungry. Hearts still break. Loved ones still die. The Lord does not promise a life free from suffering. Instead, He offers something even greater.

He comes down from His heavenly throne to be with us. In the Eucharist and through His grace, He walks beside us through every trial, strengthening us, comforting us, and giving us the courage to persevere. His love is revealed

not by removing every burden, but by refusing to let us carry those burdens alone.

It is easy to fall into the expectation that faith should make life easier—that if we pray fervently enough or believe strongly enough, the crying will stop, the hardship will disappear, and everything will be as we wish. Yet that was not God's plan even for His own Son. The Father did not remove the suffering of the Cross from Jesus. Rather, He transformed it into the instrument of salvation for the world.

The same Lord desires to work through our own crosses. When we place our daily struggles into His hands, He can draw grace from them, deepen our faith, strengthen our character, and even use them for the good of others in ways we may never fully see.

So let us not wait for our struggles to end before we look for the Lord. Let us recognize that He is already present—in the midst of the crying, the uncertainty, the disappointments, and the crosses we carry. He is waiting for us to entrust them to Him, so that by His grace, He may bring forth a greater good than we could ever imagine.

Abbot Damien 



Abbot Damien delivering his Homily on Fr. Paul's ordination.

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Monks in Oxford Part I: The Past

Br. John Baptist Santa Ana, OSB

Last term, a Business student from China told me that theology is what stands out about Oxford to him the most. He had no religious background and never heard of theology until he arrived at Oxford. Out of sheer curiosity he now attends numerous theology seminars, meets with priests at the pub, and has even taken up Latin for beginners. He said, “theology is not just in books and class lectures, it’s in the architecture—even the colleges look like monasteries!”. That’s because many of them were.



My college is Worcester (“Wuggins” in Oxford slang), originally founded as Gloucester College by Benedictines in 1283. Along the veranda are crests of all the English monasteries that sent their monks to Oxford before the Reformation. At least 38 monasteries from the provinces of Canterbury and even as far as York had monks educated here. Most of them arrived in their early/mid-twenties, after six or seven years of monastic formation. In total the college housed over a hundred monks, some pursuing Doctorates in Divinity, which at the time took seventeen years to complete! Today, Worcester is very proud of her Benedictine heritage, but she is not the only

Oxford college with monastic roots. St. John’s College was originally Cistercian, Christ Church College was Augustinian, and Trinity College also shares a Benedictine background. The abundance of monastic institutions in the Middle Ages is in part explained the papal bull decreed by Pope Benedict XII in 1336, which mandated that one in twenty monks of each house be educated at university. Thus, monasticism and formal studies were not only wedded by custom but legally bound together.





Monasteries in England were places of power, wealth, and industry. Westminster, Glastonbury, and St. Alban's each possessed tens of thousands of acres. More importantly, they provided a sense of social cohesion and stability amidst eras of severe poverty and war. Hence, it makes sense why monasteries were perceived as threats (and easy money for the taking) by regents looking to expand their rule. When King Henry VIII fell into unprecedented jurisdictional power in the wake of the War of the Roses, and after he broke from Rome for the purpose of securing an heir to the throne, monasteries became his prime targets. This came to be remembered as the Dissolution of the Monasteries in 1539. No matter where or when you are in history, revolutions always seem to go bad for monks. Interestingly enough, the most valuable material King Henry sought from monasteries, besides land, was neither gold nor silver, but lead. England is very wet. To have a waterproof roof made entirely out of lead was quite luxurious. Furthermore, lead is easily recyclable. So, after ripping the rooftops off hundreds of monasteries, Henry VIII left their walls and sanctuaries to slowly dissolve into the ruins they are now today.

Centuries passed before Catholic monks were allowed to return to Oxford in 1895. Most of their time had been preoccupied running parishes and schools as a way of justifying their existence to the state, resulting in clericalization of the English Benedictine Congregation. The community of Ampleforth made a triumphal comeback in Oxford with the foundation of St. Benet's Hall in 1897.



This provided permanent house of studies that would educate countless monks from the English Benedictine Congregation, in addition to monks from other congregations, such as Fr. Luke Dysinger of St. Andrew's Abbey, Valyermo, and Fr. Edward Mazich of St. Vincent's Archabbey, Latrobe. While San Anselmo in Rome provided Benedictines with pontifical degrees that would be useful in Catholic seminaries and universities, St. Benet's offered secular degrees recognized by the state. Thus, St. Benet's was instrumental for giving Benedictines access to secular institutions around the globe. Sadly, in 2022 St. Benet's permanently closed due to administrative and financial challenges, evacuating once more what little presence monks had regained. For four years the University of Oxford was Benedictine free until Michaelmas of 2025 when a monk of Valyermo managed to sneak back in.

Today, vestiges of monasticism still remain in Oxford. At formal dinner, students and faculty are required to wear black gowns deriving from the monastic cowl or cuculla. The beginning and end of the meal is determined by the head member seated at High Table deriving from the Abbot's table. And grace is always said in Latin.



Anyone who wishes to pray Evensong or Compline can find multiple options to choose from any night of the week. It is impossible to walk down a single street without encountering some kind of monastic fingerprint. That said, even though colleges like Worcester proudly advertise their monastic heritage, the university has drifted far from its roots. What originally began as a place for monks to study is now a world leading research university. This is not only true of Oxford but numerous institutions. On the one hand we marvel at the fruit born by the labor of humble monks. On the other hand we lament the secularization of universities across Europe and the US. However, I am often encouraged by people like my friend in the Business School,

who testify to theology's relentless habit of popping up unexpectedly. Students and faculty are always amazed when they discover that I am a Benedictine from California pursuing a DPhil in theology. "So you're the monk?" they say, and treat me as if I'm some long-lost heir to the throne. Even my college advisor partially jokes about how I intend to reclaim Wuggins for the Benedictines...and he's partially right.

A Monk's Reflection: John Cassian, St. Benedict, and St. Bernard of Clairvaux: Ancient Wisdom for a Recurring Troubled World

Fr. Matthew Rios, OSB

Before dawn, while much of the world still sleeps, a monastery awakens. A single bell breaks the silence. Lamps are lit. Psalms begin to rise into the darkness. Beyond the monastery grounds, wars continue, economies fluctuate, political rhetoric grows harsher, and technologies advance at breathtaking speed. Yet within the choir stalls, the same Psalms that sustained the Desert Fathers fifteen centuries ago continue to be sung.



This is not an escape from history. It is one of the Church's oldest ways of healing history.

Every age believes its problems are unique. Yet every age has also produced men and women who sought God above all else. John Cassian, Benedict of Nursia, and Bernard of Clairvaux belong to that great company. They lived during times of upheaval no less dramatic than our own, and each discovered that the deepest renewal of society always begins with the conversion of the human heart.

Every generation imagines that its challenges are unprecedented. Wars rage across nations. Political divisions fracture communities. Economic uncertainty burdens families. Technology promises connection yet often leaves people lonelier than before. In such a world, one might wonder whether the wisdom of ancient monks still has anything to say. The answer is a resounding “yes”.

<https://anastpaul.com/2018/07/23/saint-of-the-day-29-february-st-john-cassian-c-360-c-435/>
accessed 7/22/26

John Cassian, St. Benedict of Nursia, and St. Bernard of Clairvaux represent not merely three important figures in the history of Western monasticism, but three stages in the unfolding of a tradition whose central concern has always remained the same: the search for God. Although each lived in a different century and responded to different historical circumstances, all three inherited the wisdom of the Desert Fathers and adapted it creatively to the needs of their own age. Their lives remind us that authentic monasticism has never been an escape from history but a prophetic response to it.

Today, as the Church continues to reflect on the dignity of every human person, while the world struggles with violence, displacement, economic instability, and deep cultural polarization, these three monastic masters continue to offer a remarkably relevant path toward peace.

John Cassian: Purity of Heart in a Distracted World

John Cassian stands at the crossroads between East and West. Born in the fourth century, he traveled extensively through Palestine and Egypt, learning directly from the Desert Fathers whose wisdom he later transmitted to the Latin West through his two enduring works: the *Conferences* and the *Institutes*.

The *Conferences* present conversations between monks and experienced abbots on the spiritual life, exploring prayer, humility, obedience, discernment, community, and the ultimate purpose of monastic existence. The *Institutes*, influenced especially by Evagrius Ponticus, focus on the inner struggle against the "eight evil thoughts"—gluttony, lust, avarice, anger, sadness, acedia, vainglory, and pride. These are not merely ancient temptations, but enduring realities that continue to shape every human heart.

For Cassian, the goal of monastic life is *puritas cordis*—purity of heart—which opens the soul to the Kingdom of God. This purity is cultivated through continual prayer, humble obedience, ascetic discipline, meditation on Scripture, and guidance from wise spiritual elders. Asceticism, however, is never an end in itself. Its purpose is not the rejection of the body, but the healing of the whole person so that one may become more fully conformed to Christ.

Cassian's insights seem surprisingly contemporary. Modern society often battles not only external conflicts but also interior fragmentation. Constant information, social media, endless news cycles, and perpetual distraction can leave the heart restless and divided. Cassian gently reminds us that before peace can exist in the world, it must first take root within the human heart. Interior silence remains one of the greatest acts of hope.

It is remarkable that Cassian's diagnosis of the human heart remains astonishingly contemporary. The names of the temptations may have changed their outward appearance, but not their nature. Avarice has become consumerism.

Vainglory has found new expressions through digital platforms. Acedia often disguises itself as endless distraction. Pride now hides behind self-sufficiency. The battlefield remains exactly where Cassian located it—in the human heart.

Modern society frequently seeks solutions through greater efficiency, more information, or stronger institutions. Cassian begins elsewhere. He would first ask whether the heart itself has become capable of receiving God. For if the heart remains divided, no amount of external progress can produce lasting peace.

St. Benedict: Building Communities of Peace

Among those deeply influenced by Cassian was Benedict of Nursia. In Chapter 73 of the Rule, Benedict explicitly recommends both the Conferences and the Institutes as essential spiritual reading for monks.

Benedict lived during the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, a time marked by invasions, political instability, social upheaval, and moral uncertainty. His world was not unlike our own—a civilization searching for stability amid profound change.

Rather than writing a grand political manifesto, Benedict wrote a Rule for ordinary people seeking God together.

The seventy-three chapters of the Rule provide practical guidance on prayer, work, humility, obedience, stability, hospitality, community governance, and the daily conversion of life. Its opening word, *Obseculta*—"Listen"—captures the heart of Benedictine spirituality. The monk listens first to God, then to Scripture, to the abbot, to the community, and ultimately to every circumstance through which God speaks.

Benedict's genius lies in his remarkable balance. Prayer and work, contemplation and action, discipline and compassion, authority and mutual respect—all find their proper harmony within the monastery.

Perhaps nowhere is Benedict more prophetic than in his insistence that every guest be received as Christ and that even the monastery's tools be treated as sacred vessels of the altar. Such teachings reveal a spirituality that recognizes the sacredness of persons, creation, and ordinary daily life.

In an age marked by polarization and dehumanizing rhetoric, Benedict's vision remains profoundly relevant. Communities flourish not because everyone agrees but because everyone learns to listen. True peace begins not by winning arguments, but by cultivating hearts capable of reverence.

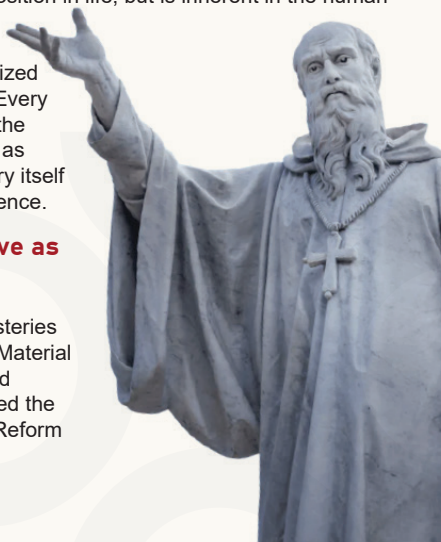
Benedict understood that societies are not renewed primarily by legislation, but by communities that embody another way of living. The monastery became a "school of the Lord's service" because it patiently formed persons capable of listening before speaking, serving before ruling, and welcoming before judging.

Such a vision resonates deeply with Pope Leo XIV's recent appeal to place the human person once again at the center of culture. In Magnifica Humanitas, he warns that every technological, political, or economic development must remain ordered toward the dignity of the person and never reduce human beings to instruments of efficiency or profit. Human dignity does not depend on a person's abilities, wealth, or position in life, but is inherent in the human person.

Benedict would surely have recognized this instinct. Every guest is Christ. Every brother deserves reverence. Even the monastery's tools are to be treated as sacred vessels because the ordinary itself participates in God's gracious presence.

St. Bernard of Clairvaux: Love as the Heart of Reform

By the twelfth century, many monasteries had grown wealthy and influential. Material prosperity, political involvement, and institutional success often threatened the simplicity envisioned by Benedict. Reform became necessary.



The Cistercian movement, founded at Cîteaux, sought to recover the original spirit of the Rule through greater simplicity, manual labor, liturgical sobriety, and fidelity to the Gospel. Among its greatest leaders emerged Bernard of Clairvaux. Bernard was not interested in reform for its own sake. He sought a renewal of love.

His writings consistently emphasize humility, simplicity, charity, and above all, the soul's desire for God. For Bernard, desire itself is already evidence of God's gracious action within us. God awakens in the human heart the longing that only God can satisfy.

His affective spirituality transformed Western monasticism. Rather than presenting God merely as an object of theological speculation, Bernard invited Christians into a deeply personal friendship with Christ, especially through meditation on the humanity of Jesus and the mystery of divine love.

His message also speaks powerfully today. Our world possesses immense technological power, yet often struggles to love well. Efficiency frequently replaces compassion. Productivity overshadows presence. Bernard reminds us that the deepest reforms are never merely structural; they begin in hearts transformed by divine love.

Bernard understood something our age desperately needs to recover: truth convinces most deeply when it is accompanied by beauty and love. His theology is not cold speculation but living fire. Again and again he returns to the mystery that God first desires us before we ever desire Him. Love itself is God's first gift.

In an age increasingly shaped by algorithms that predict our choices and technologies that imitate intelligence, Bernard reminds us of something no machine can reproduce: the human capacity to love. We may construct astonishing tools, but we cannot manufacture charity. The deepest movements of the soul—wonder, compassion, repentance, contemplation, self-giving—remain gifts born of grace.

An Ancient Wisdom for Today's Church

Cassian teaches us the discipline of the heart.

Benedict teaches us the discipline of community.

Bernard teaches us the discipline of love.

Together they offer a remarkably complete response to many of the anxieties of our own age.

As wars continue to wound countless innocent lives, monastic prayer quietly intercedes for peace. As economic uncertainty tempts societies toward fear and self-preservation, monastic simplicity witnesses that true wealth is found in God. As political divisions deepen suspicion and hostility, Benedictine communities continue their daily practice of listening, forgiveness, hospitality, and reconciliation.



<https://focus.org/posts/meet-the-saints-stbernard-of-clairvaux/>
Accessed: 7/22/26

The Church today repeatedly reminds us that every human person possesses an inalienable dignity because each one bears the image of God. Monastic spirituality has proclaimed this truth for centuries—not primarily through theories, but through the concrete practice of welcoming the stranger, honoring each brother or sister, caring for creation, and recognizing Christ in the ordinary.

Perhaps this is why the monastic tradition continues to endure. It does not promise quick solutions to the world's problems. Rather, it patiently forms women and men whose hearts are capable of becoming instruments of God's peace.

In every age, the search remains the same.

The world changes.

Empires rise and fall.

Wars begin and end.

Technologies advance.

Yet the deepest longing of the human heart remains unchanged.

We learn from the three masters to go deeper into the mystery of God:

Cassian asks: What are you seeking? —

Purity of heart.

· Benedict asks: How will you live? —

Listen with the ear of
your heart.

· Bernard asks: Whom do you love? —

Love without measure.

Those three questions are timeless. They begin in the Egyptian desert, echo through Monte Cassino and Clairvaux, and reach us today amid artificial intelligence, geopolitical instability, and cultural fragmentation. They suggest that while the circumstances of history continually change, the deepest questions of the human heart—and the Gospel's answer to them—remain wonderfully constant.

Like Cassian, may we seek purity of heart.

Like Benedict, may we become artisans of peace through attentive listening.

Like Bernard, may we discover that every authentic reform begins with a deeper love of Christ.



https://sanctoral.com/en/saints/saint_benedict.html Accessed: 7/28/26

Only then can our monasteries continue to become what they have always been called to be: schools of the Lord's service and quiet witnesses that another way of living is still possible.

Perhaps this explains why monasteries continue to matter. Their true contribution has never been measured by numbers, influence, or visibility. Their greatest work is quieter.

They remind the Church that before Christians are activists, scholars, administrators, or builders, they are seekers of God.

The Desert Fathers preserved silence.

Cassian preserved wisdom.

Benedict preserved community.

Bernard preserved love.

Their inheritance now belongs to us.



Every time a monk rises before dawn to chant the Psalms, welcomes a stranger, forgives a brother, tills the garden, teaches a novice, or quietly returns to prayer after distraction, the ancient tradition continues its gentle work of renewing the world. Pope Leo XIV has recently invited the whole Church to build "a more human and fraternal society" by learning once again to place the dignity of every person at the center of our common life. Monasticism has sought precisely this for seventeen centuries—not through slogans but through conversion, stability, hospitality, and charity.

The world may continue to be marked by conflict and uncertainty. Yet wherever hearts are purified, communities become schools of charity, and Christ is preferred above all things, hope quietly takes root. That, perhaps, has always been the hidden vocation of the monastery.

<https://citydesert.wordpress.com/2015/12/12/discernment-in-the-desert-fathers/> Accessed: 7/28/26

The Fire

By Garret Brown

For Fr. Phillip

Last night's rain just a story now

and a comfort:

Seeing through windows, the great stone fireplace,
glowing, bright with flames,

the lush imagined cracklings.

Briefly, we sat there, its own flaming altar,
before the others gathered, with their rush of words.

Glimpses then, and musings, the burning logs lodged deep
within the hollowed (even hallowed) grey cave.

O primal,

primordial, corporeal,

sweet and simple centrifuges of this earth:

rains, fire, the damp leaves, welkin of bruised night sky,
shelter, food, drink—

hosts and hosted.

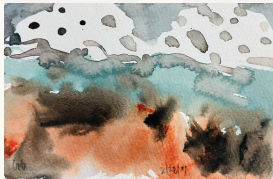
I remember parties then and great cities, so many windows,
bright, too,

that comfort, those beckonings.

My loneliness, though awkward and mute, also
the privilege of omnipotence,

rose up ineluctable and
everlasting, that great yearning.

It's here now, not to jabber or
break the spell, but to finally, simply join, mingle, imbibe,
give thanks, invisible but so clearly present. Like you.



All is Gift

Curtis Kauffman, Obl, O.S.B

Isn't it quite something that our prayer "routine" can-and does-occasionally surprise us with an ever-so-brief glimpse into the transcendent? When it happens, time itself seems to stand still for just that split second necessary to see, and perhaps even begin to grasp, the Divine plan. It can take one's breath away, proving yet again that there is never anything routine about our encounter with the Lord. Just so.

Lectio during the morning office on an otherwise ordinary recent day brings such an experience, and with it a rare vision of absolute and unmistakable clarity. There I am contemplating my gratitude for the gift that Christ has given to each of us, freely offering his life for the redemption of our sins, when I realize that this unconditional gift yet carries with it an awesome obligation and responsibility, if one chooses to fully accept it. As this gift is planted deep in the center of my soul, what is set in motion as a result is the yearning for purity of heart, which, although not conditioned by the giver, is nonetheless most certainly longed for by anyone who fully embraces the gift. It is an awesome thing, an astonishing reality. Obligation becomes quest.

What is most amazing is that our "yes" sets us on a lifetime journey filled with the expectation of one day attaining spiritual certainty, an experience of the transcendent that brings to fruition all that we hope for as we move forward toward sanctification.

This moment of clarity revealed for me just what it means to live justly encompassed by all that this gift entails; the knowledge of how I must demonstrate through my actions exactly how much I value it. I wonder at this: how can I ever become worthy of this most incredible sacrifice? It is a mystery that is quite unfathomable, yet thankfully persists in its gentle probe to move one toward belief and trust through these brief glimpses of ultimate Truth. Are you living your life in a way that will prove equal to or worthy of this sacrifice? Are you becoming the person God intended you to be? How is your vow of *Conversatio Morum* giving you a template for perseverance and eventual achievement?

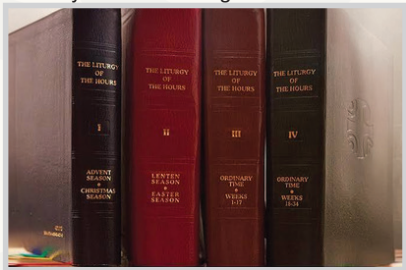
What a blessing it is to be a Benedictine Oblate, with all of the tools, instructions, and guides, both ancient and contemporary, necessary for the task. What a blessing it is to have the Liturgy of the Hours and the possibility that a regular prayer life can bring revelation of this kind.

The Revelation:

Our pathway to sanctification, even perhaps holiness, is paved by the ultimate sacrifice of the One who knew, knows, and continues to urge us forward toward imitation, toward completion, that is, toward a perfection which mirrors that which the Lord has revealed to us--pointing us inexorably toward sainthood. What was once unthinkable (what, me? Nah, never. Not gonna happen), is now exciting and full of actual possibility. Could it be? Truly? Perhaps. There is still great work to be done to even begin to understand what it all means. But an element of faith includes trust, and that in turn brings hope. Remain steadfast. Pray unceasingly. The journey itself is the point.

Two poignant scenes from the movie *Saving Private Ryan* emerge from dwelling deep in my memory, leading me through this contemplation on the true nature of pure "Gift". They are sort of book-ends to the story of the frantic search throughout France in WWII by a special task force charged with finding and bringing home a single soldier. Among those who give their lives in this pursuit is their leader, Capt. Miller. In a final scene, as he lies dying, he looks into the eyes of the rescued Pvt. Ryan and says these haunting words "Earn this."

The other book-end scene shows Ryan late in life standing and meditating at Miller's grave in Normandy, wondering, as we are led to understand, if he has in fact lived a life worthy of all that was sacrificed to save him. Did he move beyond mere gratitude and fully embrace the gift that was freely bestowed upon him? Was his redeemed life indeed good



enough to and for the men who died getting him home? It is a profoundly moral tale of Gift that gives us a glimpse into the very foundation of our Christian faith: our redemption and salvation as Gift.

A gift, freely given. A gift of sacrifice. A gift of a life given over to death for the benefit of each one of us, individually. Personally. He died for Me. It is simply astounding to ponder, an inexplicable mystery. I think one can actually find real humility by accepting this notion. “I am a worm and no man”...yet Christ died specifically for this insignificant being.

Am I worthy? Am I more than merely grateful? (Thank you very much. Now that I am redeemed and saved, I need do no more.) Am I fully immersed in a God-centered life as He “extends my years by way of a truce”, so that I might have more time to become...perfected?

The Process:

Being a Benedictine Oblate gives me—gives each of us—a pathway that has been faithfully and resolutely trod for centuries by spiritual brothers and sisters all seeking the same thing—the hope that one day we will gaze on the face of the One who gave this gift freely, and with it, the promise of eternal life in His kingdom. As Benedictines we seek God, and together this faith community, then and now, engages in right worship immersed in the Psalms, the daily Office, the rhythm of a contemplative prayer life, all of which guides us through life’s trials, heals our wounds, and prepares us for the eternal joy of companionship with our Creator.



Thankfully we are accompanied on this faith journey by Christ himself, the Incarnate Word who shared in our humanity, with all of its struggles, thereby giving us the gift of likewise sharing in His divinity. We are made to be holy, and in this way honor the Gift while walking with Him on this sacred pathway. Our Benedictine spirituality illuminates this path in beautiful ways: on the shared journey with our Oblate community of believers, past and present; in joining our prayer with the universal church each day; in following the gentle rhythm of the monastic community at St. Andrew’s Abbey that we deeply cherish; and in the Abbey’s sacred space that provides for us a place of refuge where one senses the presence of the Holy Spirit in every inch of its peaceful grounds.

Let us celebrate the various gifts that have branched off from that one selfless giving of Himself: The gifts of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Sacraments. The gift of community. The gift of the transcendent (the good, the true, and the beautiful). All of these and more cascade from that ultimate source who made such a mysterious and holy sacrifice.

If all is indeed Gift, then all the rest is gratitude in action.

Good and gracious God, give me the grace to trust in
You always, the character to act according to Your will, the
purity of heart to see my many blessings as pure Gift, and
the courage to act boldly in imitating You
with gratitude. Amen



https://www.ldysinger.com/retreats/benedictine_tradition_and_formation/00a_start.htm Accessed: 7/28/26

Entertaining Angels

Mary Schulte, Obl, O.S.B

*A*s reported in the Book of Acts of the Apostles 1: 8, Jesus said "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the earth." These are not mere statements; they are promises to be lived out in the ordinary moments of our daily lives.

Encouraged by my spiritual director two years ago, I began discerning what my spiritual gifts are. As a lifelong Catholic, I was surprised at how little I knew about spiritual gifts, or how they differ from the fruits of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

We are given one or more "special abilities" or charisms to be used for the building up of the Church. They are also known as spiritual gifts. They are distinguished from the fruits of the Holy Spirit, which are described in the Catechism of the Catholic Church ("CCC") as perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us. CCC 1832 lists twelve fruits of the Spirit: charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity. CCC 1831 and 1845 describe the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit which "complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them." They are: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. These sanctifying gifts are given to us in baptism and are sealed in confirmation.

Our spiritual gifts/charisms, in contrast, are other directed, and may be "extraordinary or simple or humble" (CCC 799). Whereas the fruits of the Spirit describe moral virtues, spiritual gifts relate to enabling or equipping Christians for service and ministry. All members of the Church are given spiritual gifts "for the building up of the Church" (CCC 951, Lumen Gentium 12, Romans 12: 6-8, 1 Cor. 12:7, CCC 2003-2004). In exercising our spiritual gifts, we are also witnesses to the world of God's love for all of humankind.

The Holy Spirit chooses our spiritual gifts for us, "allotting His gifts to everyone according as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:11), distributing special graces among the faithful of every rank (Lumen Gentium 12).

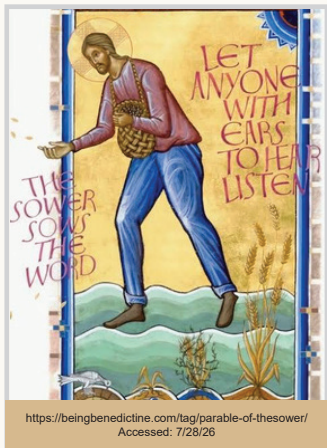
The discernment process helped me identify my charisms, one of which is hospitality. Two others are encouragement and evangelism, both of which I exercise in conjunction with hospitality. The 'Called by the Spirit' program used in the Diocese of Cleveland describes those with the spiritual gift of hospitality as persons who “thrive at opportunities to create environments of welcome, especially for those who are somehow disconnected. They focus on including others into the community by fostering a culture of belonging, respect, kindness, and a sense of home. They passionately encounter Christ in the stranger and feel comfortable bringing people together.”

Hospitality is also described as one of the 'tools' of Benedictine spirituality. This does not mean that every monk or every oblate has hospitality as a spiritual gift, but the practice of hospitality is for all of us.

Throughout Scripture, God commands his people to be hospitable: “When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt” (Leviticus 19:33-34). During His public ministry, Jesus and his disciples relied on the hospitality of others as they went from town to town (Matthew 10:9-10).

The early Christians also depended on and received and received hospitality from others (Acts 2:44-45; 28:7). Hospitality was a highly regarded virtue in the New Testament times, especially for Christian leaders (Titus 1:8; 1 Timothy 3:2).

I love opening my home to guests and strangers, but hospitality is not primarily about being a good host or hostess. I exercise hospitality when I see the face of Christ in the stranger, in the person standing with outstretched hand at the freeway offramp, in the person I find it hard to connect with. With the Holy Spirit's help, there is no end on any given day, in all of its ordinariness, to finding numerous and seemingly small ways where I can be hospitable.





<https://www.newarkabbey.org/spirituality>
Accessed: 7/23/26

I had a roof replaced a few years ago. I noticed that at around noon, during an unseasonably hot week, the men sat out on the curb eating their lunches each day. I have a spacious spacious patio with shade, and a few days into the job. I asked them to please come out back where it was cooler. I offered to order some pizzas for them. I think I took more joy the next day in watching them devour the pizzas and the sodas than they had doing the devouring!

Another example of the gentle but insistent breath of the Holy Spirit at work in me is this: One day I was in my car stopped at a light,

waiting to turn left, and I saw a disheveled man standing just feet away from me, his eyes and head downcast. He was holding a sign with the simple words "Please help me". The red light showed no signs of turning green. Sinner that I am, I averted my eyes, and then immediately heard a still voice from within gently chide me with "How dare you avert your eyes? This man is the face of Christ." So, I rolled down my window and waved him over to me. I said "Hi, my name is Mary. What's your name?" His face lit up as he responded, "Frank". I told him he was named after a great saint, Francis. The whole exchange lasted a minute or less, including giving him a larger bill than I had first intended to give (the Holy Spirit also said "Mary, don't be a cheapskate"). I said "God bless you Frank", and he blessed me back. Then, the traffic signal turned green. I don't know what he did with the money, but I do know that maybe that man saw the face of Jesus in me, as I saw Jesus in him.

Whenever I head to the Abbey, I ask God to help me recognize the newcomer, to find that person, and to welcome him and her. God always answers that prayer, even when it becomes inconvenient to my 'plans'. Repeatedly the insistent voice of God tells me to listen, and to look for and see Christ in the person who is hurting in some way, searching for something 'more', or wanting to know about the oblate life.

When I extend myself to the other, to the stranger, I practice hospitality. One day I was at the Abbey to unplug from the noise of my daily life and to be silent. I was going to read, walk, pray, and listen to the quiet. God had other plans for me. I didn't do much reading or walking, but I did end up doing a lot of praying and listening. There was only one other person on retreat that particular day. I found myself sitting across her at lunch, and I was not wanting to engage in conversation. I thought to myself, "I can't be rude and there's no harm in at least saying hello and exchanging names". After introducing myself, I asked her name, and whether she had been to the Abbey before. Upon learning that this was the young woman's first visit, I asked "So what brings you here?" Her eyes filled with tears as she told me, and I said "Let's talk after lunch". I ended up spending most of the afternoon and evening with this guest, listening to a very sad story, at times simply holding her as she wept with tears of fear, sorrow, and hopelessness. My own life experience, and professional training were exactly what she needed. I followed up with her via text and email when I got home the next day, providing her with some resources for help. In ensuing months, while we never met in person again, I stayed in touch via email and text. Twenty months later, this one-time guest to the Abbey is well on the road to healing and hope and a new life.

Discerning one's spiritual gifts includes asking oneself these questions: What brings me joy? What do others say? When I use this gift, does it feel like prayer? Do I feel a sense of God's presence when I use it? Am I effective with this gift? Does it feel like a "fit" with my personality and temperament? Each of the encounters I described here gave me great joy, and felt like "Yes! This is prayer! God is here, right here in the midst of this!"

Whether we have it as a charism or not, as Christians and particularly as oblates, we are called to practice hospitality. The Rule of Benedict tells us this. RB 53 directs that all guests must be welcomed as Christ, greeted with courtesy and love. Guests are people we meet wherever are.

Sister Joan Chittister describes hospitality as "attention and presence to the needs of the other" and even as a "form of worship". It is not just "a warm meal and a safe haven". (The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century, RB 56.)

In *Preferring Christ*, Norvene Vest writes about having a “sacramental awareness” of all persons we meet.” She describes hospitality as the “fourth vow” of the Benedictine. In *St. Benedict’s Rule: An Inclusive Translation and Daily Commentary*, Sister Judith Suter urges us to welcome those we meet as “...one who is the image of the Creator.” Acknowledging that “It is a challenge to see Christ in everyone,” Sister Suter writes that there is a “sacredness” to hospitality.

All of us can practice Benedictine hospitality by being available, attentive, and accepting to all God sends our way. By offering the gift of our time, listening, showing interest in the other, giving of oneself, we are hospitable. We can ask ourselves each day, “How can I see and welcome Christ in strangers?” Trust me, if the ears of your heart are open, the Holy Spirit will answer.

Mary Schulte has been an oblate of Saint Andrew’s Abbey for 18 years, and recently presented a one-day workshop at the Abbey on the topic of discerning and using our spiritual gifts.



<https://holycrossbenedictines.weebly.com/ourbenedictine-values.html> Accessed: 7/28/26

Around & About The Monastery



Fr. Paul Ortega, OSB's ordination with Bishop Gerald Wilkerson, Abbot Damien, monastic community, his family, Oblates and friends of the monastery. (June 27)



Prostration during the chanting of the Litany of the Saints.



Fr. Paul's first Mass. (June 28)



Oblation of New Oblates. (July 11)



Monks' Retreat June 7-12, with Fr. Thomas Gricosky, OSB of St. Meinrad Archabbey.

Rite of Acceptance to the Novitiate of
Br. Simeon Doyle and Br. Camilo Diaz. (August 14)



Retreats

July

Retiro de Silencio

July 31-August 2, 2026

Presenter: Carlos Obando, Obl., OSB

Room, board, & meals:

\$340 Single; \$270 each shared

August

EDITH STEIN: Her Journey from Darkness into Light

August 7-August 9, 2026

Presenter: Fr. Joseph Brennan, OSB

Room, board & meals:

\$340 single, \$270 each shared

HEALING OUR WOUNDS:

Forgiveness in the Spiritual Life

August 24-August 28, 2026

Presenter: Dr. Nancy Wallis

Room, board, & meals:

\$540 single, \$470 each shared

ANCIENT AND MODERN BENEDICTINE SPIRITUALITY:

Contemplative Practices For Today (ZOOM Option)

August 28- August 30, 2026

Presenter: Fr. Luke Dysinger, OSB,
MD, DPhil

Room, board, & meals:

\$333 single, \$266 each shared,

\$150 Zoom

September

OUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY: Models of Spiritual Progress, Ancient and Modern (ZOOM Option)

September 25-27, 2026

Presenter: Fr. Luke Dysinger, OSB, MD, DPhil

Room, board, & meals:

\$340 each, \$270 each shared, \$150 Zoom

Slowing Our Pace with Saint Benedict

September 28-30, 2026

Presenter: Mary Caputi

Room, board, & meals:

\$270 single, \$235 each shared

October

Pobreza de Espíritu

October 3, 2026 9 am-3:30 pm

Presenter: Fr. Angelus Echeverry, OSB

Day Retreat including light breakfast and
lunch.: \$55

STILL FULL OF SAP, STILL GREEN:

A Spirituality of Aging

October 12-15, 2026

Presenter: Mary Schulte, Obl., OSB

Room, board, & meals:

\$405 single, \$350 each shared

Autumn Artists Retreat

October 26-30, 2026

Presenter: Gregory Michael Hernandez

Room, board, & meals:

\$540 single, \$470 each shared

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