



OBLATE NEWSLETTER **Sacred Heart Monastery**

Benedictine Sisters of Cullman, Alabama

Spring 2010

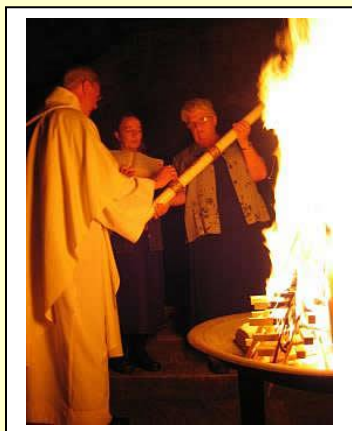
Message from the Oblate Director

The Feast of Pentecost on May 23 ended 50 days of a glorious Easter season and invited us to go forth with new beginnings to continue Christ's mission on earth as his disciples. The liturgy has been so very rich in trying to awaken us to what life is all about. And what is it about? It is all about taking to heart the following words of St. Benedict from the Prologue: *"Let us get up then, at long last, for the Scriptures rouse us when they say: It is high time for us to arise from sleep. Let us open our eyes to the light that comes from God, and our ears to the voice from heaven that every day calls out this charge: If you hear his voice today, do not harden your hearts. And again: You that have ears to hear, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. And what does he say? Come and listen to me...I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Run while you have the light of life, that the darkness of death may not overtake you."*

As I sit with these refreshing words of the Prologue, I can't help recalling the many images of light I have experienced these past 50 days: the Fire of the Easter Vigil, the procession to the chapel bearing candles lit from the Paschal candle, the presence of the lit Paschal candle during Liturgy of the Hours and Eucharist, the longer daylight hours, the breathtaking sunsets on a leisurely evening stroll, the jeweled stained glass reflection on the walls of the chapel, the surprise sunsets on my commutes home from Birmingham, and the extinguishing of the light of the Paschal candle at second Vespers of Pentecost. We stood in silence as Sister Elisabeth extinguished the candle. We stood in silence as we watched the smoke of the extinguished candle rise to heaven, as our "prayers [rose] like incense, our hands like the evening offering." (Ps. 141) The Paschal candle, though reposed at present, remains a central illumination of our lives. It will always reappear at community celebrations such as professions, jubilees, and funerals. After all, are not these celebrations Easter events also?

The Easter light has not ended. The experience of Easter has not ended. We are called to live the Easter message everyday, to be Alleluia people to all that God is love and remains alive to us and with us all the days of our lives. We must continue in the spirit of the Apostles: "They were filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke of the great things God had done, alleluia." (Acts 2:4,11). Let us keep the Easter light daily before our eyes, so that we, like Benedict, may see "the whole world gathered up before [our] eyes in what [appears] to be a single ray of light." (adapted, Life and Miracles of St. Benedict, Ch. 35)

Peace in St. Benedict,
Sr. Priscilla Cohen, OSB





“Turning is really what the whole Rule is about. It presumes the first turning, or conversion, of baptism; and it is then deeply interested in the second and lifelong turning, of daily conversion to Christ.” Norvene Vest, [Preferring Christ](#)

Formation Briefs

The Contemplative Oblate Today

**(excerpts from a talk given at the 2009 World Congress of Oblates in Rome
By Laurence Freeman, OSB)**

The full talk may be observed on the World Congress of Oblates website- http://www.benedictine_oblates.org

“Sometimes people ask me-what led you to become a Benedictine monk? Before I answer I usually think of the desert father whose reply to the question ‘what is a monk?’ was this- ‘a monk is one who asks himself every day what is a monk.’ I find I can answer the question equally honestly in several different ways. Here today I would ask you ‘why did you become an oblate?’



“What draws a person to become an oblate? How do they live oblation at different stages of their lives-as young parents or working professionals and later in retirement? What does it mean to be an oblate today at a time of great crisis in monastic history when many monasteries are closing or struggling to survive?”

“Traditionally, Benedictine life has been seen as “mixed”-that is neither solely contemplative nor active... This mingling of the contemplative and active dimensions of the Christian life have stimulated a great diversity of expression. The *Cloud of Unknowing* says that ‘no life is completely contemplative or completely active.’ That is good Benedictine common sense. And perhaps there is an even deeper meaning in merging contemplation and action, as this is what Jesus seems to mean by the ‘one thing necessary’ in the Martha and Mary story. Jean Leclercq used to say: was Jesus a monk? If so, should we not all be monks? If not, do we have the right to be a monk? This tension of identity is at the heart of the gospel and indeed of human life itself. It is a tension that Benedict handled wisely and brilliantly in his Rule. Monks and oblates live it out differently by their obedience to the same Rule.”

“The contemplative dimension of the Rule has often been under-emphasized because Benedict

seems to concentrate on the challenges and structures of community life rather than on the interior journey. The oblate and monk are, however, enriched and made more flexible in their respective vocations by remembering the full mystical import of the Rule.”

“There is only one Rule for all forms of Benedictine life-for monks, nuns, and oblates living in the world. It has no clerical bias and, like the desert tradition, does not elevate one form of vocation above another. The monk who clings to his status in distinction to others is not yet a free monk. The oblate who sees himself as responding less fully to the call of discipleship, because he is not a monk is not yet a free oblate. All that matters is to ‘truly seek God’.”

“...the oblate can continue in the more conventional form to live in the world as a spiritual friend, associate or member of a monastic community. In whatever form of commitment the oblate seeks God through prayer and work and makes peace his ‘quest and aim’.”

“Monasticism in its many forms, including a renewed form of oblate life, has a special and precious capacity to teach contemplation to a spiritually thirsty world.”

Tarrawarra Abbey Podcasts on the Prologue of the Rule of St. Benedict

While surfing the web I discovered these podcasts on the Prologue by Michael Casey, a Cistercian monk of Tarrawarra Abbey in Australia. In these podcasts of approximately 5 minutes each, he presents a commentary on verses of the Prologue. They can be downloaded from the following site: <http://www.cistercian.org.au/iMonk>

I would highly encourage you to take advantage of these podcasts for your ongoing formation. Casey is the author of Strangers to the City, Toward God: The Ancient Wisdom of Western Prayer, Sacred Reading, A Guide to Living in the Truth and many other publications.

If you are into Blog browsing to assist you in prayer and lectio

and you like the writings of Macrina Wiederkehr, you may enjoy her blog (called *Under the Sycamore Tree*, A Mostly Weekly Journal). She is a Benedictine from Fort Smith, Arkansas and author of many poetic and spirituality books and there are descriptions of the books on her home page.

<http://macrina-underthesycamoretree.com>

These blogs are very centered in the Benedictine way of life.

And don't forget Living the Tradition: A Benedictine Blog

on Sacred Heart Monastery's website (www.shmon.org). Sister Elisabeth Meadows has posted some very creative writings on our monastic life here. She is very poetic and posts a new blog every few days. We have really enjoyed reading them and our monastic intuition can predict that blogs will occur shortly after significant and surprising moments of our lives.

*“Oblates are affiliated with a particular
Benedictine monastery
and share a spiritual union and human friendship
with the monastic community there.
They are bonded in prayer, love and commitment,
becoming intimate partners
in the prayer and works of the monastery.”*

From Benedictine Oblate Companion
Saint Meinrad Abbey



One Oblate's Life in the World

Rebecca Riviere, an Oblate in Tucson, Arizona, was an Oblate of Sacred Heart Monastery for a few years while she lived in Huntsville. She returned to her oblation site a few years ago and re-affiliated with the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. Rebecca remains in my e-mail directory and always responds to any communications, reflections, and prayer requests. She shares our happenings with her Oblate deanery in Tucson. The following is her reflection on living the Benedictine way of life as an Oblate in the world:

LIVING THE WAY AND CALL

By: Rebecca Riviere, Oblate OSB

This is my 17th year as an Oblate of the Order of St. Benedict. From the first word of the Rule: "Listen" to the last question: "Are you hastening toward your heavenly home?" and the words that follow: "Then with Christ's help, keep this little rule that we have written for beginners." I have found a pathway of life that is so practical and yet so profound, that it has threaded its way through all that I do. Joan Chittister, in her book: The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages, makes this comment: "Life is a teacher of universal truths...Life is a way of walking through the universe whole and holy." I believe this completely.

Since moving back to Prescott, AZ from Huntsville, AL, I have returned to my birth Deanery: Prescott Oblates of Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. The Monastery in Tucson is our family center. Being connected with the larger family, through the Benedictine Sisters of Sacred Heart Monastery in Cullman, AL makes the words of Joan Chittister come alive for me. I really am walking through the universe whole and holy. Life has been a teacher of universal truths and the Holy Scripture and the Holy Rule of Benedict have given me the eyes to see truths and await more truths to arise. Every inch of this journey has been filled with lessons to learn and truths to unfold.

Presently, I have published 2 books: Mountain Top Prayer; and Wisdom's House. I am working on the third, Flowing River, which I hope to have published this summer. I have been asked by our Church to do a daily commentary on the Scripture, called: *Word from the Word*, for the Church's website. Every week I send a commentary on the Psalms to about 50 e-mail friends called: *Word for the Week from the Psalms*. Many of the commentaries have been included in a daily devotional called: Spear Ministries: SMI devotional.

My call from GOD is prayer and teaching. By His Grace, I am able to teach the Holy Scripture at our Church. I am also on the prayer team and intercessory prayer ministry. Last fall, I was given a license as a Chaplain, serving the LORD among the poor and the sick, giving comfort and love to those who are hurting.

Many are seeking, searching and digging for the close, personal relationship with JESUS. The Grace of GOD can reach them when we submit ourselves to Him and are open to reaching out to others. The gentleness and kindness of the Rule, encourages me to be kind and gentle to this world, hurting from the bitterness and hardness of struggling to survive. The Rule has taught me to hold life lightly and loosely, so that I can speak peace to the harsh winds of life's storms. I have learned to listen to the heartbeat of GOD and to help others stop and listen to that Divine pulse, beating with love for us all.

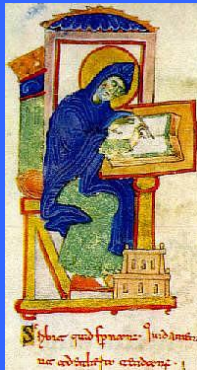
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*"It takes hope to assume
that God is present even when we cannot see
the road ahead."*

Joan Chittister, The Pursuit of Peace

Save the Date!!!
Annual
Oblate Retreat
Weekend

October 8-10, 2010
Registration will be sent out in August



Upcoming Retreat Center Events
Balancing the Martha and Mary Within

June 19, 2010 ~ 9:00 am-3:30 pm

In the Gospel of Luke 10:38-42, Jesus is attentive to both Martha and Mary; both work and prayer are necessary components of everyday life. This reflection day will invite participants to reflect on the active and contemplative aspects of their lives as we explore the meaning of this Gospel for a seeker's heart in this fast-paced world. There will be time for prayer, reflection, and sharing.

Retreat Director: Sister Priscilla Cohen, OSB

Cost: \$30

Contact Retreat Center- 256-734-8302

retreats@shmon.org

God's Holy Surprises

June 22, 2010 ~ 9:00 am- 2:00 pm

The inner voice in all of us beckons us to encounter the holy, to discover the extraordinary in the ordinary. Sometimes God comes in the unexpected and surprises us. Moses and the Burning Bush will be the basis for exploring the God of Holy Surprises. The day will include prayer, presentations, discussion, time for private reflection, and Eucharist with the monastic community.

Retreat Director: Sister Marie Leonard, OSB

Cost: \$30

Contact Retreat Center



Bright Dawn of God, move through my life with winds of blessing.

Reveal! Illuminate! Make known!

Unveil the treasures that are hidden from my sight.

Gift me with stars in the clouds of my night.

Usher me into meadows of delight.

Macrina Wiederkehr, Gold in Your Memories

Community News

Sister Janet Marie and **Sister Tonette** are continuing with the on-going efforts of the Capital Campaign. Please keep them and all the committees in your prayers.



Sister Karen Ann Lortscher is in Rome, Italy from May 19- June 19 for the Benedictine Renewal Program. She will be touring Benedictine sites in Rome with 28 other Benedictine women from around the world.

Jubilee Celebration

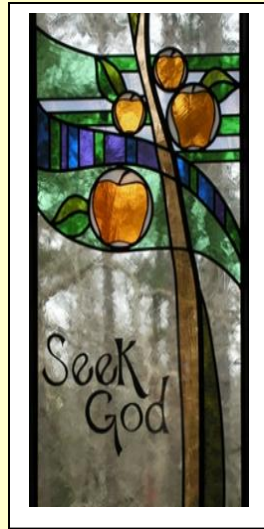
Sister Mary Leo and **Sister Francine** will be celebrating 75 years and 60 years of monastic profession. This will take place during the closing of our retreat on Friday, June 11, 2010, the Feast of the Sacred Heart.



Sister Mary Leo Arnold
75 years



Sister Francine Hasenbein
60 years



*"Receive me, Lord,
as you have promised,
and I shall live;
do not disappoint me
in my hope."
Ps. 119: 116*

Oblate Expectations

- Pray morning and evening prayer daily.
- Practice *lectio divina* daily as a way of growing deeper in your relationship with God.
- Plan some time for silence each day and plan a retreat day occasionally.
- Radiate a Christian presence of love and hospitality in your family, your Church, and your workplace.
- Read a portion of the Rule daily.
- Attend the annual Oblate Weekend retreat and visit the Monastery when you are able.
- Pray daily for the Sisters of Sacred Heart Monastery and for all of the Oblates.
- Pray for increase of vocations to Sacred Heart Monastery.
- Do at least one positive deed for someone each day.

