

Obsculta

"Listen with the ear of your heart."

September 2021

Celebrating Forty Years Ora et Labora



February 1981 - February 2021

"Persevere in prayer. Gratitude will open our souls to the unity of God, self, and others. Gratitude moves us from limitations and fear to expansion and love. Gentleness will lead others to God's eternal intent of true joy and freedom."

The quarterly newsletter of
The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, Common Observance
Worldwide Membership of Monks Living Outside of a Monastery
Founded 1981
1606 Briar Lake Circle Winston-Salem, NC 27103 336 918-0975

www.CistercianMonks.org



Celebrating Forty Years Ora et Labora

February 1981 - February 2021

If you are married or single, and believe that God is calling you to a closer life with Him... If you always wanted to be a monk, hermit, oblate, or priest but never thought you could because someone told you “no” or you thought it was impossible for some reason. We are here to help you fulfill your vocation.

Our typical member is a married working man/woman who is active in their church and community and who wants to advance in their spiritual life. Several of our members are advanced in age and have a physical disability.

We seek men who reside in the USA, with a call to priesthood through ordination or incardination and accept those who are currently bishops or priests who wish to stay in their existing jurisdictions

“There is *no other group* that can lay claim to our holy foundation, structure and government, programs, membership, formation opportunities and requirements, not to mention our longevity at 40 years! The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, Common Observance is alone in its legitimacy, tenacity, and excellence.”

We welcome our brothers from the Monastery (Skete) of the Most Holy Trinity Veracruz, México



++ Rev. Brother Daniel, OCCO

Prior Monastery of the Most Holy Trinity

Metropolitan of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in Mexico, Scholar and Psychotherapist.

He is a Grand Doctor of Philosophy in Theology and Christian Philosophy from the International Theological Academy (Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation), a Doctor of Theology in Christian Philosophy from the International University of Fundamental Studies (Saint Petersburg, Russian Federation), and a Doctor of Philosophy in Gestalt Psychotherapy from the Centro de Estudios e Investigación Gueálticos (Xalapa, Mexico).

He also received formation in the areas of Communication (Universidad de las Américas-Puebla), Education (Universidad Pedagógica Nacional y Universidad Mexicana) and Psychology and Family Counselling (International Christian University).



+Rev. Brother Konstantin, OCCO

Brother Konstantin is distinguished by an almost Renaissance vision of life.

He was a chef; He studied Business Administration, Senior Management and Administrative Management, Theology, Ministry, and Counselling and Spiritual Direction; he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in Psychology; has a deep interest in Naturopathy; and he has dedicated himself to researching the elaboration of ointments, tinctures and syrups, using traditional monastic recipes and procedures. In the Monastery of the Most Holy Trinity, he oversees making natural medicinal products, under the patronage of "Saint Trypho"; and from the kitchen, including the preparation of breads, cakes and liqueurs.

the Monastery (Skete) of the Most Holy Trinity Veracruz, México (continued)



Rev. Brother Vlad Vasilij+, OCCO

He was born in Louvain, Belgium, to Bolivian parents, and became a naturalized Mexican.

Along with his religious activities, he is a film director, screenwriter and producer. His works include “Tiempo real”, winner of the grand prize at the One Take Film Festival in Zagreb (Croatia); and “Escrito con sangre”, winner of the Best International Film Award at the Yellow Fever Independent Film Festival in Belfast (Northern Ireland).

He studied as a filmmaker at the International School of Film and Television of San Antonio de Los Baños, Cuba, and a bachelor’s degree in theology and a master’s degree in ministry from the Saint Andrew’s Theological Academy of Xalapa, Mexico.

He oversees the Saint Agnes of Rome Mission of Dos Ríos, Veracruz, Mexico.

Mission of Saint Romanos the Melodist (Dependence of the Monastery of the Most Holy Trinity) Guayaquil, Ecuador



Rev. Brother Elías +, OCCO

Presbyter, singer, singing teacher, vocal coach and music producer.

PresbyterOriginally from Caracas, Venezuela, he studied music at the “José Lorenzo Llamozas” School and at the “Juan José Landaeta” National Conservatory of that country. He completed his initial theological training at the Santa Rosa Catholic University and a Bachelor of International Studies at the Central University of Venezuela. Later, he obtained a master’s degree in Singing (Summa Cum Laude) at the “Pancho Vladigerov” State Academy of Music in Sofia, Bulgaria; and the Doctorate in Counseling and Spiritual Direction at the Saint Andrew’s Theological Academy of Xalapa, Mexico.

He has made recordings for Bulgarian Radio and Television, alternating with the Sofia Children’s Choir and with the singers Petar Petrov and Nicolai Giuselev. In 2004, as a composer of his own songs with Venezuelan rhythms, he made the album “Fantasía Llanera”. This was followed by two others, in 2011 and 2016, with Orthodox and Byzantine songs.

He directs the “Saint Nicholas of Myra”; and is in charge of the Saint Romanos the Melodist Mission in Guayaquil, Ecuador.

What is a Cistercian Oblate ?

Oblates are Christian men or women, over 16 years of age, who celebrate the Protestant, Catholic or other Orthodox Christian traditions and wish to develop a deeper personal and communal experience of the Risen Christ and share in the important work of the Order.

Oblates are welcome to participate in Chapter meetings, community life, retreats, seminars and the like. They do not wear a habit, but may wear the Cross of St. Benedict.

Oblates strive for faith, hope and charity. They also strive for poverty, meaning generosity, chastity according to their state of life, obedience to Our Lord and to His ministers in the Church, obedience to civil law, and stability. Oblates will be considered as Third Order members.



Let us Welcome our New Oblates

Graham is a devout Anglican from the United Kingdom with a Master's degree in Theology. He is active in his church and a devoted husband. He has become an Oblate to further his devotional life.



Konya is married with two children and currently serves as a Protestant hospital chaplain in Hungary. He has become an oblate to further advance his interior prayer life.

Oh No!!!

by Raphael



I still could not tell you exactly how it happened. It was 1:00 A.M. and I was cleaning up a file or two on my desktop before hitting the sleep key. An errant couple of keystrokes, done too quickly, and my entire Documents folder disappeared. That's right, disappeared! I was gutted. All of us probably know that moment of **catastrophic computer failure**, when months and possibly years of stored work, personal documents and communications evaporate. As a former academic in a distance learning university, I had accumulated 15 years and more of work on my hard drive. My backup software had developed a glitch that I had neglected to repair. Now I had dumped the whole shebang into oblivion: my panicked attempts to reverse the keystroke actions were futile. *I could not believe* what had apparently just happened and I was too tired to respond effectively. I went to bed not knowing how serious the damage would be. Foremost in my mind were days of work on my first paper for Abbot Oscar Joseph in my formation program for the Order.

First thing in the morning, I emailed the Abbot to alert him of the fiasco, to vent my fears and frustrations, and to let him know the essay **deadline was in jeopardy**. He extended compassionate understanding (quite familiar himself with such moments) and it arrived like rain on parched soil. Then, I hit the internet to research data recovery software, a minefield of expensive and self-promoting promises to wade through, very difficult to trust. I blindly opted for the shiniest one and 12 hours later 2 million opaquely titled files were dumped back on my desktop. A day after that I had unearthed my key recent documents, including my draft essay for the Abbot.



A week after this and **my computer hard drive completely crashed**. The machine would no longer boot up. In the meantime, however, software glitch repaired, I had recovered a complete backup from an external drive. I ordered a new machine and set to work in the meantime on my tablet, with its hair trigger touch screen keyboard, on the overdue essay on the Rule of St Benedict. I had decided to focus my discussion in the essay on the three vows of obedience, stability, and conversion of life. Mirroring feedback from Abbot Oscar Joseph encouraged me: “Stability in this situation is the commitment to resolving the problem. Conversatio is your self-reflection and desire to change.

Obedience is the behaviour that you implemented to do the above.”He showed me the computer crash experience had been a vivid exercise in trying to put the vows into effect. “Obedience without delay,” St Benedict teaches, “becometh those who hold nothing dearer to them than Christ” (Ch. 5, ll 1-2). Stability, the vow to “persevere in the monastery until death” (Prol., l. 50), is translated by Fr Adalbert de Vogué as “silence,” the ability to listen and to hear our experience as the teaching of God, whether it comes to us interiorly or through others, especially our seniors in the monastic life. “Conversion of life” is not only our conversion to Christ and to the monastic way of life, but also the daily commitment to apply that effort of transformation at every level of our experience, as St Paul instructs us: **“Be urgent in season and out of season, . . . in patience and in teaching” (2 Tim. 1-3).**



Gudelio, Cupertino and a hammock

By Brother Konstantin, OCCO



Gudelio y Cupertino are dog pets that live in the Most Holy Trinity's Monastery: an American Pitbull terrier and a schnauzer. Brother Konstantin, OCCO, has made them the protagonists from a story series in order to make a smile come over in all the faithful of the Church and inviting them to reflex a little bit.

In the very moment Father Serafín came to the Monastery from Merida, Yucatán, he brought an object that took Gudelio's and Cupertino's attention: a hammock. They didn't take their eyes from it while the Monk was taking a nap. That hanging net seemed so comfortable with its hypnotic swing!

Once the nightfell, at the vespers time, when the prayers emerged from the Chapel, the two mischievous dogs could not stand for a second more. Both, with energetic and precise jumps, they managed to get into the hammock, with the will to encroach it and stay the night there.

Cupertino got cozy in the most comfortable position, and Gudelio crossed himself with his paw and started his night prayers, invoking his predilected Orthodox Saints (those who have shown his holiness with animals).

—Saint Modest, stay with us tonight, Saint Mammes, stay with us tonight, Saint Artemias, stay with us tonight, Saint Brandan, stay with us tonight, Saint Gerasimus, stay with us tonight...

He could not finish so loving litany, though. The net from the hammock broke and both dogs fell directly to the floor.

While Cupertino kneaded his hips, he saw Gudelio with anger in his eyes.

—You fool! That's what happens when you invite a lot of them!



KATHLEEN P. RIVEST, PH.D., D.D.

MARIAN SCHOLAR
PUBLISHED AUTHOR
TV AND RADIO PERSONALITY



Called or Chosen

Several years ago I reviewed Scripture searching out verses having to do with being “called” or “chosen”. The verse, “many are called; few are chosen” refused to leave my thoughts. Along with the mental nagging of this verse was the voice of God saying to me that the Hebrews are His chosen people because they chose to be chosen. Hmm, what could this all mean?

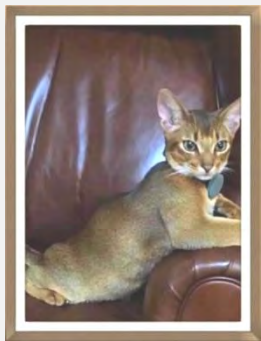
Taking a large concordance in hand, I wrote down, then read, passages of Scripture having to do with calling and choosing, hoping to better understand the difference between being called by God or being chosen by God. Scripture tells us that God has placed knowledge of Him in each and every person. After the flood, God told Noah that the rainbow is a sign of a covenant, created by God, between Him and all living creatures. Thus, all people of all ages have been “called” by God and have the ability to enter into a relationship with Him.

Through my study I came to understand that we can move from the “called” state to the “chosen” state if we do as the Hebrew people have done. This requires agreement on our part to God’s discipline. A review of Hebrew history shows us this is not easy or pleasant. It can mean enduring physical hardship, doubt, slander by unbelievers, and other difficulties, all while maintaining fidelity to holiness. No wonder it is only a few who reach this category of relationship with God.

There are benefits to enduring God’s refining fire. His promise to answer prayers increases as we become more holy, more trustworthy, and more obedient. You will recall Mary’s request to Jesus at Cana. Though Jesus said it was not yet his time, Mary’s request had to be honored. She had served at his side for 30 years and had earned the privilege of having her prayers answered. Water was turned into wine.

But that is not the end of the story. There is another category of believers, called “faithful.” The faithful have endured through long periods of time and have been found worthy of Him. Revelation 17:14 says Jesus will take with Him His, “called, chosen and faithful followers” when he overcomes, “the beast.”

Those of you who have answered the call of our Lord to join the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross and persevere toward holiness should anticipate that difficulties will be put upon you. Temptations will need to be faced and overcome. The world will not like nor understand you. I pray you will continue your journey in spite of these things, because the world that does not understand you needs you. Amen.



Want to Learn About Life? Talk to Your Cat

Stability/Obedience/Conversion of Life

Should I miss our morning stability promise on the stairs Mister is sure to take ownership of my chair. His attitude is a clear demand that I keep the promises that I have made. My focus should first be on him. After all I did promise to do everything that I can to not only maintain but advance our relationship. He consistently reminds me to do the doings of the stability that I had promised and my need to change my behaviors.

Stability is a rooted engaging commitment to place, time and relationships.

Expectations found in genuine stability:

External

Reliable patterns in persons and life events where one can productively live their life while attending to the present moment.

Internal

Inner stability is focusing on God and responding to the moment with love. Face one's pain and destructive emotions. Look for the best in others and an eagerness to forgive.

Stability is achieved through persistence, patience and humility. Focus on God and prayer.

For Benedict obedience is an action taken when we exercise both physical and emotional stability.

Obedience to others is the way that we live out our obedience to God.

Obedience is accountability in community and in relationships by focusing on the needs of others.

Obedience is putting God at the center of our lives thus giving a balance between our needs and the needs of others.

Obedience is to take only an action that is endorsed by those who show wisdom and understanding.

Conversion of Life

Is openness to possibility of changing behaviors to respond to God's plan for your lives and your vows of stability and obedience by practicing the presence of God and keeping your death always before your eyes.



Over the past twenty years God has spoken to me directly and often regarding the Cistercians.

He has always been encouraging.

Clearly He has sustained us through His grace.

Below our Good Lord's describes what He wants us to be.

“We, The Cistercians of the Holy Cross, are embedded icons, living sacramentals; who sustain, grace, and hold together the fiber of our communities. Our martyrdom is conversatio, stability and obedience.

We live in and are influenced by the heretic nature of our culture. However, while clothed in our holy habits we become sacred icons. When people gaze upon us they look into their hope and see reflected back the Source of all Hope. We become sacred signs, living sacramentals.

The Pax of our contemplative lives provides the necessary stillness to speak without words. The rhythm of ora et labora and the earnestness of our vows are our martyr's cross.

Persevere in prayer. Gratitude will open our souls to the unity of God, self and others. Gratitude moves us from limitations and fear to expansion and love.

Gentleness will lead others to God's eternal intent of true joy and freedom.”





Br. Columcille, OCCO+

Br. Columcille, OCCO+ was ordained to the Holy Priesthood of Christ in April of 2006 thus making him the very first monk in the Order to be ordained by a bishop of the Order.

In the photo on the right Rev. Br. Columcille, OCCO is giving ++ Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO his priestly blessing.

Summary report of findings from research project commissioned by Lord Abbot General researched by Br. Columcille, OCCO+

As the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross approaches our 40th anniversary, Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO++ asked for research regarding any other religious orders/communities based in the United States that are like ours. The following information sketches my methods and results.

There are approximately 140 internet search engines and web directories available today. I decided to limit myself to the five most commonly used in the United States: Google, Yahoo, Bing, Ask, and Duck Duck Go.

Then, I made a list of descriptors for our Order, our mission and the opportunities/services provided to members. These included (but were not limited to): *dispersed, non-residential, religious order/community, apostolic succession, Independent Anglican, Independent Catholic, conservative, monastic, monks, vowed religious, priests, ordination/incardination, brothers, sisters, novice, life-professed, formation, postulant, oblate, seminary/theological college, extern, rule, constitution, abbot.*

With these descriptors identified, I began the process of searching for them singularly, or in conjunction with one another, using my five search engines one at a time. I started with directories and continued on to individual sites. With the vast results, I limited my time for each group, concentrating on any "about us" information that could provide structure, membership and mission statements. I used this data in comparison with the aforementioned descriptor criteria related to the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross.



Continues on the following page

Over the course of about seventy hours, I collected, categorized, and edited a pool of religious groups. The vast majority of these groups were easily culled by failing to meet the key descriptors of our Order. Many were exclusively Roman Catholic or Anglican, etc. so failed in comparison to our more ecumenical membership. Others were extremely liberal, ordaining women to the priesthood, having no claim to apostolic succession, etc. These were removed when compared to our more conservative charism both socially and liturgically. Others failed by a lack of clear structure and/or mission statement. These were more like loose confraternities made up of mostly laypeople. More of a Third Order aspiration, but without any guiding Rule or discernable leadership. And of course, there were dozens of dead links and references to groups I could not find, or that had a severely outdated “cover page” and nothing else. One has to assume that these groups are now defunct, if they ever existed in the first place.

Lastly and sadly, there were the pretenders. And there were *a lot of them!* These groups usually had very few members and seemed more to be *role playing* at being monks, hermits, even priests and bishops. I shudder to think of the people they have misled into grievous spiritual harm.

To conclude, I can proudly say this to you: Father Abbot, Brothers, Sisters, Oblates and friends; we are *unique*. There is *no other group* that can lay claim to our holy foundation, structure and government, programs, membership, formation opportunities and requirements, not to mention our longevity at 40 years! The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, Common Observance is alone in its legitimacy, tenacity, and excellence.

My God bless and protect this Order and all of the earnest, holy people who that make it our true spiritual home.
Amen

Dearest Brother Columcille, OCCO+ the Cistercians will always be grateful for your labor of love and faithfulness.



The “We Got Your Back Program” was inspired by Br. Benedict, OCCO.

Br. Benedict often said, "Miracles are always happening because God loves you. He's got your back."

Br. Benedict was a life professed Cistercian monk who went on to heaven on September 13, 2018.

He was an exceptionally holy monk. Br. Benedict was humorous, captivating and a dear lover of our Lord.

His wife, Alexis, describes Br. Benedict as “a deeply devoted man, not only to God, but to his family, friends and any stranger who needed a prayer or a friendly conversation.

He had a gift for making anyone feel like family. He could see people's hearts and never held a grudge.”

In loving memory of Br. Benedict and our love for the Cistercian Order we have founded

The “We Got Your Back Program”

Four areas of support

Spiritual Support

Enrichment Support

Making Life Easier Support

Financial Support

For detailed information go to; www.CistercianMonks.org

These are Your Volunteers



Monks can also be deacons and priests



Deacon Monks can

- Develop local faith communities
- Do religious services
- Preach
- Baptize
- Marry
- Bury

Priest Monks can also

- Celebrate the Holy Eucharist
- Hear confessions
- Give The Sacrament of the Sick



- The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross is happy to receive male applicants for Holy Orders, e.g., Priest, Deacon. We would also consider incardination for other rightfully ordained clerics.

- While there are traditional qualifications for ordination/incardination, the principal interest is discerning a true vocation and developing Priests or Deacons who are fruitful ministers. Therefore, educational requirements may be individually tailored.

- We celebrate valid apostolic lines of succession, the seven sacraments and liturgical worship consistent with the historical churches. We adhere to true apostolic teaching.

- If you are interested in ordination or incardination, complete the application found on our website and forward it to the Abbot General. His office will then contact you.

The Memorial Day for our dear Br. Paul, OCCO is June 24th. He was a true blessing to our Order.

From The Abbot:

Rather than list the qualities of the Cistercian Charism and discuss what we can do for you I am listing below some comments from members on what we have done for them.

“The Cistercian charism is a refuge for ardent lovers of God. The adherence to the Holy Rule of St. Benedict and focus on contemplating God in prayer is a precious balm on hearts aching for closer union with the Lord. The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross is an opportunity for men or women to become a true monk or nun in this revered tradition.”

“The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross serves God in a variety of ministries throughout the world. Our union with each other, developed through common prayer also unites us to Jesus Christ, whom we ultimately serve with joy.”

“There were certain things that prayer, study, and scriptural research have convinced me are required in my own path. It was important for me that the order be contemplative, and that it adhered to the traditional orthodox teaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. I was not interested in joining an order that was too easy, or that bent over too far to be politically amenable. It was important to me that I would be well guided along the way.”

“Indeed, our affiliation with the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross has brought tremendous spiritual blessings to us and our dear ones. The Cistercian habit has become an effective and visible sign of the healing and reconciling presence of our Lord Jesus.”

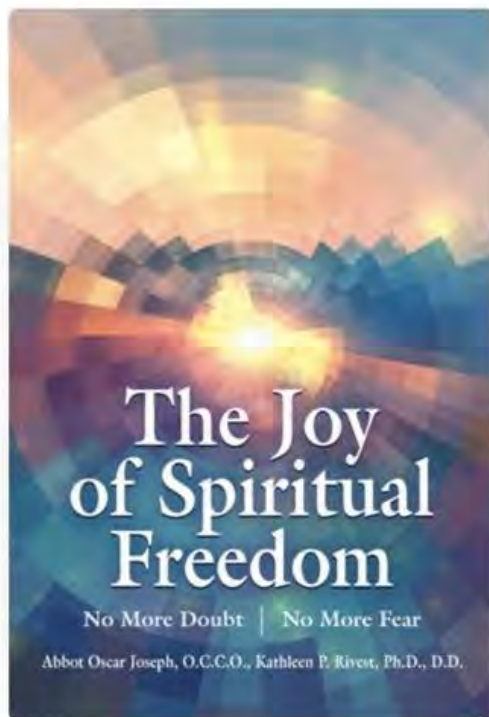
“When I joined the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, the first thing that changed was my prayer life. Before, it was a life-less obligation, a burden my wife and I committed ourselves to pray at least the Morning and Evening Prayers and whenever time allows, to pray the other offices as well. This helped us to become more prayerful, teaching us to offer everything to God each day; referring to Him even the mundane things of our daily life. I started seeing myself opening more and more to my wife in terms of communication, becoming more forgiving and affirming. My relationship with the Lord started improving tremendously. Whereas before, obeying God is a duty, now it is a joy.”

Suspicious Signs of a Call to Contemplative Religious Life

Desire to grow in union with God through prayer. Love of God that manifests itself in a desire to give one's life to Him. Desire to live simply. The wish to live life with less stress and more order. Generosity. Ability to listen to others and accept direction when needed. Desire to worship God in all the moments of life.

Contact us immediately if these symptoms appear.

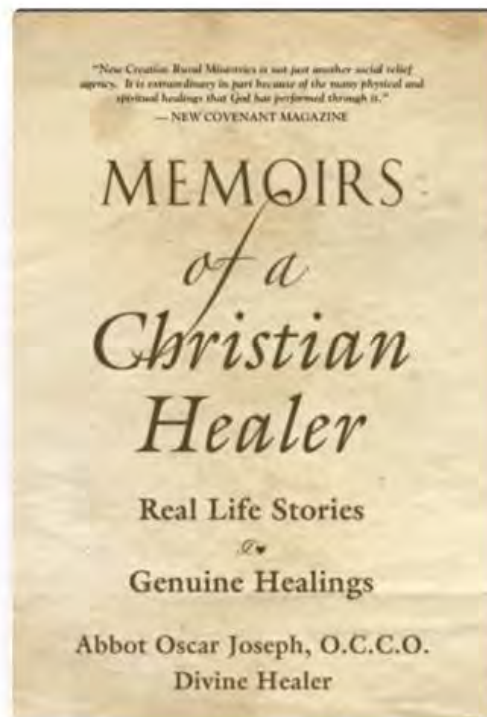
Abbot@bellsouth.net



The Joy of Spiritual Freedom

No More Doubts | No More Fear

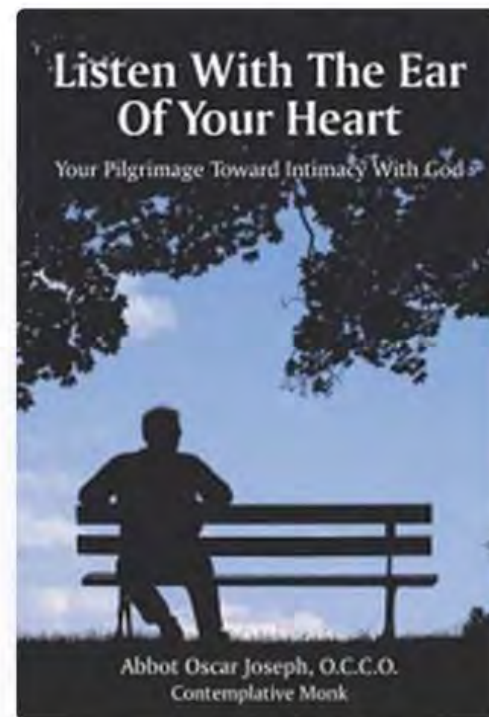
The Joy of Spiritual Freedom is the first of a trilogy that leads and inspires the reader to enter into a joy-filled relationship with a loving God. It is grounded in Biblical wisdom revealing how to remove debilitating doubt and fear. It draws from inspirational letters and case studies that illustrate the Gospel path toward freedom.



Memoirs of a Christian Healer

Real Life Stories | Genuine Healings

Memoirs of a Christian Healer chronicles the miraculous works of God. You will experience the joy of victory and the sorrow of human weakness. Incorporated within the many stories the Abbot includes reflective lessons on the Healing Ministry. The many stories are of real people and genuine healings.



Listen with the Ear of Your Heart

Your Pilgrimage Toward Intimacy with God

God created you to yearn for intimacy with Him. Listen with the Ear of Your Heart presents a dynamic pilgrimage utilizing Scripture, the teachings of the Church Fathers, The Rule of St. Benedict, prayer, meditation and contemplation.

For more information on 20% discount and Newsletter go to
AbbotOscarJoseph.com

CISTERCIAN ORDER OF THE HOLY CROSS, COMMON OBSERVANCE



We serve men and women, clerical or lay, married or single by:

- *Helping them grow in perfection through the use of the Rule of St. Benedict, our Constitution, Manual and community life.*
- *Consecrating to a first or second order religious life those who want to live either in community or outside community.*
- *Third order oblate program.*
- *Validating and assisting those already living the religious life but not living in a formal community.*
- *Supporting men with a call to the diaconate and priesthood through ordination, incardination.*

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*For more information contact
Abbot@bellsouth.net*