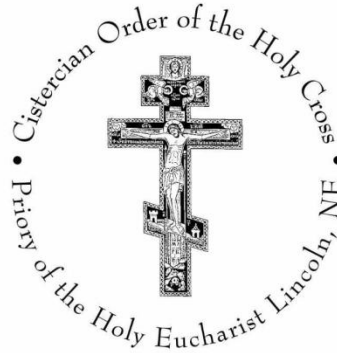


Obsculta

“Listen with the ear of your heart.”



**Forty-two Years
Serving the Lord**

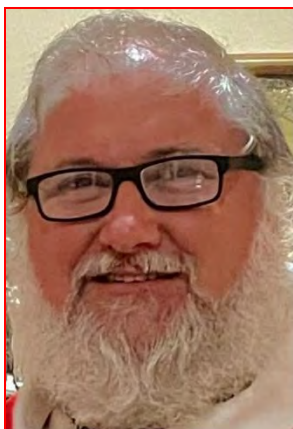
June 2023

“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



May 4th & 5th were days of wonderful celebration—our old and dear friend visited with us. **Orthodox Metropolitan John Rinkle** did many of his favorite things, such as eating, talking, and eating. And, yes, we prayed and celebrated the Holy Eucharist.

What a joy, praising God for His loving mercy in our lives.

This Obsculta mirrors our moments of philosophy, theology, and life events. I encourage everyone to read slowly and reflectively. There is much valuable learning to be experienced.

We also welcome postulant **Jorge from Columbia**. He is a heartfelt addition to our Cistercian family.

Throughout this Obsculta you will see some of our monks' prayer holy places.



One doesn't enter the religious state because he is holy but because he wants to become holy.



By Father Matthew Pius, OCCO



For as long as I've been a Monk I've always heard of people seeing or feeling the Gates of Heaven open during the Mass and an insurmountable amount of grace flowing down. I don't doubt those who say they experience the mystical because I've had a few of those experiences myself but to say I've seen the Gates of Heaven open myself was not on that list. Or at least that's what I could tell people until yesterday, and because the urge to share it with everyone is so strong, though I'm still trying to wrap my mind around the experience myself, that this article flowed from my fingers as if it were the Holy Spirit typing for me.

Prior Matthew Pius, OCCO+, Elevated to Vicar General, Coadjutor, of the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross

On May 17, 2023, I officially celebrated one year as a life-professed Monk with the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross. It's odd to think that a year has passed, and it's incredible to look back at my life before the Cistercians and my life after the Cistercians and what a difference it has made.

This year is the close of the first decade of my public ministry.

On Sunday, May 21, 2023, I formally accepted the Office of Vicar General and am excited to take on this new role. I can tangibly see how my entire life has been geared toward joining this particular Order in these peculiar days.

As your new Vicar General, I am most excited to know every one of you and build relationships that will last a lifetime. And to assist the Abbot General in providing an atmosphere where individual and community goals are reached, thus creating a bond of unity.

I will support the Abbot General as our Chief Shepard and spirit of renewal and harmony in the administration of the Cistercian Order.

I am most thankful for our beloved Abbot, His Excellency Abbot-Archbishop Oscar Joseph. He saved me from the soul-draining cesspool I had been floating in, and God answered when I needed an honest Bishop the most.

Father Abbot was Holy Spirit inspired and called me to serve as your Vicar General, which speaks highly about all Abbot Oscar Joseph's hard work over the last 30+ years and his tireless dedication to seeing the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross succeed. That, too, is my mission.

May the Almighty and merciful God continue the good work that He has begun in us!



Come and Worship with us at
Saint Alberic's Church
on Easter Sunday
at 10:30am
to celebrate the Resurrection of Our Lord
at the
Belmont Community Center
3335 North 12th Street Lincoln, NE 68521
Phone: (402) 413-5490

Hopefully the older we get our wisdom becomes bolder.

by Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO, M.S., Ph.D., D.S.T.

Please note that my efforts to describe the purpose of and interaction between the body, soul, and spirit falls short of the totality of the interaction. We are more mystery than science or theology.

I feel that it is necessary to point out that whatever is negative or harmful to humankind is from original sin still operating, the devil, or our personal or corporate sins. God does NOT give, cause, or use evil for His purposes.

Seldom does God give us burdens of any kind to test us in any way. Yes, throughout history, including in Scripture. individuals have been tested by God for the purpose of providing that individual the opportunity to grow towards God. But note that these individuals already possess spiritual and emotional maturity. I believe that it is safe to say that most of us are not among these select few. Yes, we have said and have heard otherwise from the pulpit but I believe that this is our misguided way of avoiding responsibly for our own actions. Mostly we experience a sowing and reaping. That is not to say that through grace we cannot learn and overcome from our sowing and reaping.

We often mistake the enthusiasm of young Christians to mean spiritual and or emotional maturity. Those who have been around for a long time sometimes think that just “showing up” actually produces spiritual and emotional maturity. Some mistake a desire to do good, be good, and pray ten minutes a day will actually produce anything other than false pride.

God’s grace operates more like yeast than a lightning bolt. The road to Emmaus is more about the cross than moments of emotional self-satisfaction. The closer we become to God the more He seems to become unapproachable. The more we actually understand our worthlessness the more we want to approach Him. Yes, becoming a Christian is more a life journey of dying to self and becoming more intimate with the Divine.

It is difficult to say this but the truth is... not all churches are created equal. Those who hold the entire deposit of faith have more to offer its members. These churches are part of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic church founded by Christ Himself. If you do not understand what I just said then probably your church is not one of these. Please be a seeker of truth and search out these churches.

It is difficult to say that... God’s love is not unconditional, He does have favorites, He is merciful but He is also just, there is a real hell and the earth is not it. There is a heaven and knowing that should mean that we behave really differently than we do now.

It is difficult to say that... much of what we hear from the pulpit is founded in pop psychology and the narcissism of our human nature. For example the lie of self esteem, beliefs that we can control God, personal interpretation of Scripture, we can be Christians and not be intimately involved with a legitimate church, faith alone is enough we are not required to do holy works. I could go on and on. Again please be a truth seeker and do some research from credible sources.

Finally, our walk should lead to a profound understanding that everything is prayer, everything is God, and that we in, with, and through Him.

Continued on next page

We need to honor all of what we are to be truly spiritual.

Continued from previous page

Body provides a corruptible material vehicle for the soul and spirit and can, with the help of Divine Grace, be drawn to God.

Soul is the non material and eternal character of the body, e.g., gender, intellect, free will, reason, personality, etc.

Spirit is non material and eternal. It gives life to the body/soul combination.

The body, soul, and spirit are affected by environment, family of origin, the individual's activities, e.g. religion, education, purposeful growth.

It is most helpful to see man as a triune person, meaning each part affects the other in both positive and negative ways. Below is a modest, although hopefully accurate, list of potentially positive and negative effects upon each body, soul, and spirit. I will list them in terms of the positive and negative elements acting upon the individual as they approach God in this world.

It is good to note that God can and does overcome all of our obstacles that can come between man and Himself.

Body:

Positive effects upon: good mental and physical health, healthy life style, thriving emotional and physical environment, an active spirituality and community life, a healthy soul and spirit.

Negative effects upon: Psychiatric problems, lack of emotional stability, chronic illness, physical disabilities, diseases, destructive emotional or physical environment, little or no spirituality, and community involvement.

Soul:

Positive effects upon: Include here the positive effects of the body as seen above. Additionally you might add education, purposeful emotional and spiritual growth and participation in a church, and social structure. The positive development of conscience, healthy intimate, and corporate relationships, a good sense of self including sexuality, problem solving, the ability to understand and appreciate non-material things such as ideas, music, the arts etc. This individual is more heavenly bound.

Negative effects upon: Include here the negative effect on body as seen above. Additionally you might add erroneous education, no or little emotional and spiritual growth and little or no participation in a church and social structure. Improper or no development of conscience, healthy intimate and corporate relationships, no or little healthy sense of self including sexuality, problem solving, little or no understanding and appreciate non-material things such as ideas, music, the arts etc. This individual is more earthly bound.

Spirit:

Positive effects upon: I include here the positive effects upon both the body and soul. The following helps the spirit to grow and produce more life to the individual. For this person everything is spiritual, everything is prayer, everything is God. There is a focus on serving others, humility and meekness, exhibiting the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit. This individual has an invested prayer and church life, a Rule of Life, a spiritual director, and a confessor. This person studies the church fathers, history, and is a seeker of truth.

Negative effects upon: I include here the negative effects upon both the body and soul. The following hurts the spirit to grow and produce more life to the individual. For this person everything is about him/herself, what he/she can possess, and personal power, emphasis on negative feelings, self esteem, and status. There is little or no focus on serving others unless there is something in it for him/herself, and even at the expense of another's reputations etc. This individual believes that he/she is the judge on truth and will not submit to authority.

Genuine Mysticism

The mystic undergoes a moral transformation. Ordinarily this is a long process. The impediment is our clinging to our selfishness, our own desires, and our own willfulness. The mystic does not dissolve the ego in the psychological sense...on the contrary, in that sense the mystics have extraordinarily strong and healthy egos.

The moral transformation of the mystic is practical, showing plainly in appropriate social activities, and is steady. It is a concrete, everyday continuing life of justice, patience, generosity, and all the other virtues.

Genuine mysticism grows up out of and returns to a life characterized by common sense, intelligence, and rationality.

The genuine mystic has an enriched vitality and enters into worldly work with strength, interest, cheerfulness, and appropriate concern.

The genuine mystic will have a certain peculiarity in his attitude toward his work. He will be completely dedicated to it, study it with care, do his very best with all his resources in terms of the needs of the work itself and for its own sake, but he will not be attached to it. This means that if he succeeds, he will not exult or congratulate himself. If it fails, he still will not lament or despair. He does all that he can, and he rests in peace. This combination of dedication and detachment is an almost infallible test for the authenticity of the mystic's life.

The real mystic will have a sense of humor. He will not take himself seriously. He will be playful like a child, laugh easily, enjoy all sorts of simple things, be able to appreciate beauty, and thoroughly savor every aspect of life. He will relate comfortably to other people and all in all seem to be a most down-to-earth ordinary sort of person.

Author Unknown



Mysticism, A Summary Description by Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO

Michael Casey, a Monk of Tarrawarra, wrote Stranger to the City, Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of St. Benedict. Br. Michael mirrors many of my beliefs and experiences, so I happily share them with you.

"The Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner suggested that the Christian of the future must be a mystic. That should be the focus of the Cistercian formation."

"Without an explicit contemplative orientation, monastic asceticism makes little sense. Monastic life is a road that leads to union with God. What monastic life offers is a slow process of purifying the heart so that it can perceive the deep mystery in which we have been immersed."

It also teaches us how to develop a lifestyle that sustains a prayer-centered mystical life.

"Benedict himself takes for granted that such a transformation of consciousness is the normal result of a life lived in conformity with God through faith, obedience, patience, and perseverance."

"When we speak of mysticism, we are speaking of our capacity to be drawn sometimes into a zone beyond the familiar world of space and time, in which all our interior faculties come alive. What transpires during those graced moments is beyond language. God is a reality that we can never explain or prove." This grace God gives us is a life and fullness, perseverance in prayer and serving others.

Br. Michael cautions that, "if such experience sends us off on some prophetic crusade, it is unlikely coming from God."

"A mystical experience is one in which there is no direct causation within the spatio-temporal universe. It is the fleeting imprint of eternity on our dull awareness. It cannot be known directly. It produces humility and empowerment to do something long resisted as too difficult."

Some concrete examples of everyday mystical experiences are:

- a) Conversation: It opens our eyes to see things differently and the energy to change the direction of our lives.
- b) Vocation: This gives us the courage to embark on a new life with God at the center and helps us accept the sacrifices involved.
- c) Compunction: It arouses the soul from its sleepiness and half-heartedness
- d) Searching: It satisfies looking for something the culture does not provide.
- e) Patience: produces more than character but inner strength.
- f) Self-Transcendence: Having experienced the goodness of God, nothing else will satisfy.
- g) Love: Posed by the boundless, unconditional love that even makes enemies friends.
- h) Communion: Our will conforms to God's and wishes nothing else by communion with Him

Please realize that this is a mere summary. I encourage everyone to read the entire book.



Five Stages of Spiritual Development Summarized and **red notes** by Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO

By articulating the stages and aspects of spiritual paths/journeys,
those who walked them, assist current sojourners to

UNDERSTAND

WHAT is occurring

WHEN s/he experiences/undergoes (are) those stages/aspects

Model from M Benefiel.

The spiritual journey is about becoming more and more clear about God's will for oneself, here and now, at the present moment when I am alive.

The indwelling Holy Spirit, appropriates each individual in a distinctive and appropriate degree and manner and guides the individual into knowledge of the will of God in the here and now and for this daily life.

Understanding more and more the will of God for myself, I allow God's will to transform me, and my will and needs, my conditioned and uncritically received programs of happiness (satisfaction, security, survival, need for affection, approval, status, etc).

By this transformation one's capacity and determination to understand, perceive and grasp God's will for himself, in the here and now of the present moment/s of everyday life, he become more and more able, willing, determined, to follow, execute, realize, actualize and concretize God's will at every moment.

**A sincere traveler will always have a mentor and a Christian faith community. They will never go it alone.
They will always choose a tried and true method not one of their own making.**

Continues on the next page.

Our Abbot who has been praying earnestly over 50 years makes some comments. I like these Five Stages of Spiritual Development. They are simple, accurate and understandable. Benedict's twelve steps of Humility can overlap these stages. Similarly no one is ever just at one stage. Often we celebrate and mourn our spiritual development simultaneously.

stage 1	stage 2	stage3	stage4	stage 5
awakening	transition	recovery	dark night	dawn
fullness	emptiness	fullness	emptiness	fullness

These stages are overlapping, elements of them can be present in the other stage - labeling them thus only points to the major characteristics of a particular stage.

Stage 1 AWAKENING - (experienced as, if,) FULLNESS

The individual becomes personally aware of (the need for) spiritual reality; Seeks for, tries out, adopts spiritual practices; Seeks connection with others (books, groups, relationships, correspondence, art..) on spiritual quest; Awareness of sacredness and giftedness of all activities, situations, everyday life, all discourses (cultural practices, sciences, arts, etc).

This is stage is an exciting experience. Much like the early experiences of a postulant or oblate. Often the individual's ego is unleashed and they begin to think that they have actually arrived and know it all. They become satisfied with self satisfaction and do not realize that a fall is about to follow.

Stage 2 TRANSITION - EMPTINESS

Spiritual practices appear 'not working'; Disaffection with spiritual practices; Sense of isolation (e.g. previously valued authors, guides, groups/church, ideas, etc appear meaningless, personally irrelevant); Confusion; Question following (sense, relevance of) any spiritual path; Frustration.

Stability, obedience, and conversatio and a patient mentor keep the "know it all" postulant or oblate from self deception. Prayer is NOT about self satisfaction. It is about lifting one's heart and soul to God. Moving from the bounds of this world to the freedom of heaven. Prayer is about giving your time, energy, and talents to God for His glory. There is no glory for the postulant or oblate. Prayer is about listening not blabbing.

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Stage 3 RECOVERY (this may occur repeatedly and as an aspect of any stage) - FULLNESS

Discover new (apparently more meaningful) way of relating to ultimate reality (God, the meaning/purpose of life...); Adopt new spiritual practices; Connectedness with others (from the past, present, the ideas, works..) on spiritual path; Identity connected with personal transformation; Related awareness of daily sacredness. Renewed joy. Seeking and attaining of personal programs of spiritual feelings, need for affection, acceptance, approval, security, status, power, control - begin to be transformed into more mature spiritual attitudes (feelings of love are being transformed into 'spiritual' love, agape, dispassionate passion, compassion, charity etc.)

Recovery often takes longer to arrive than one would wish. It is a good test of the depth of charity and courage of the postulant or oblate. Once recovery takes hold it is still filled with self satisfaction that can be easily destroyed. The fool hearty often believe that they have permanently arrived and become devastated when it crumbles.

Stage 4 Dark Night - EMPTINESS

Spiritual practices no longer yield transformation; Deeper core questions emerge; Sense of isolation; Deeper blocks to progress are manifested; 'deep abyss'; dryness, desert (this is part of all the stages); is this the end?'

This is NOT the Dark Night of the Soul that some Saints have experienced. Nor is it a dryness that needs a time of rest, at the well. Rather it is one more visit into self will. The individual is resisting God's perfect will. The postulant or oblate is saying, " NO God, ME I want ME." This is a painful time. GOD IS NOT TESTING. RATHER THE INDIVIDUAL IS RESISTING.

Stage 5 DAWN - FULLNESS

Spiritual practices move beyond rote, conditioning, (mind) games, to feeling 'give' and responsive; Self gets relativized (no longer ego, self as center of the universe) to higher, altruistic good; sense of greater connectedness with other creatures and the rest of the universe; sense of alignment with greater force, (transcendent) power; new ways of making meaning emerge.

This is an exciting experience. Seemingly the self has been happily destroyed and God has been allowed to take over. Soon enough the honest person will find self will and more broken humanity just underneath the shine. And so this process begins again. It is my hope that the more experienced novice, life professed and mature oblate will see this as a graced filled opportunity and rest themselves in the Lord and His definition of who they are.

Thoughts in Solitude *By Brother Richard Simonelli* Order of Sarada in America

As a contemplative who interacts with ordinary worldly life, I've noticed what interferes with or blocks my contemplative spirit. I feel like I'm riding a very spirited horse, frisky enough to throw me over and over again. But she's not a mean-spirited horse. After I'm thrown out of contemplation, the horse is usually waiting quietly for me to mount once again. I gradually begin to notice what can throw me.

Distraction is the first challenge to contemplation that I notice. Distraction means that the focus of my faith gets pushed aside by the speed and intensity of the world, or even by my own thoughts and emotions. The strong, simple sense of presence gets diverted by other calls on my attention.

Occupation is yet another challenge to contemplation. Occupation means that my inner life is taken over or occupied by concerns other than contemplation. I may be occupied by work-related issues, or by media reports of suffering and war. The many forms of occupation have one thing in common: I am taken over and lose the simple focus that brings joy, love, peace and clarity.

Drama is a third impediment to the contemplative life. When I let drama enter my psyche, I feel taken over by a kind of excitement that obscures the deep flow of contemplation. In drama, the mind and heart become possessed by a story line. It might be the drama of a personal relationship, or of personal issues. In any case, a dramatic mindset takes me away from the simple truth of contemplation. Intrigue often does the same thing. An inner condition of intrigue is full of cunning schemes to accomplish one thing or another. When intrigue blocks the state of contemplation life becomes devious and labyrinthine. The quality of simplicity is lost. In a mindset of intrigue deception and trickery are present.

Indulging the brilliant mind is also a detour to contemplation. In this case we get lost in the thinking process even though it is sharp and brilliant. We get diverted by an endless stream of thoughts, even though they are good and perhaps even productive thoughts. The contemplative then finds the self always thinking. Where, then, is the quality of contemplation?

The passionate heart is also another challenge to a life of true contemplation. The passionate heart is occupied with intense emotions or feelings. One passion after another pulls us in contradictory directions, leaving the one-pointed quality of contemplation nowhere to be found.

Now, it's not that we should not have brilliant minds or passionate hearts, but they can be so seductive that they replace the single-mindedness of contemplation with an endless rush of thoughts and feelings. They must be used in service to our deepest faith and not become a faith in and of themselves.

These diversions are not insurmountable problems for those committed to contemplation. In fact, awareness of any one of these conditions can be a sign of the contemplative's diligence. Rather than seeing these lapses as problems or enemies, they can be seen as reminders and messages. When this happens, these diversions will be taken in stride, contributing to our living peace. Contemplation is a commitment to simplicity. It is a stabilizing influence needed more than ever in busy, turbulent times. We need to become better, more alert riders of our inner horse of spirit and awareness.

Transubstantiation or Transfiguration? By Br. Raphael, OCCO+



Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of transubstantiation has been the reigning model in the Western Church to explain the Real Presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist. Thomas' argument relies on the Aristotelian categories of substance and accidents to explain the relation between the Body and Blood of Christ and the consecrated elements of bread and wine. I will briefly argue that the Scriptural accounts of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1–8, Mark 9:2–8, Luke 9:28–36) provide a better vocabulary and set of coordinates for understanding the sacramental mystery than do Thomas' use of terms derived from Aristotle's philosophy of nature. Briefly stated, St. Thomas argues that, after consecration, the elements of bread and wine entirely give way to the true presence of the Body and Blood of Christ. The Body and Blood become the substance that we are given in Communion, and the elements of bread and wine cease to exist, becoming a mere "accidental" appearance. The Body and Blood of Christ are received by us in a manner that is obviously not in accordance with nature, but in a manner derived from his resurrected and glorified person, now sitting at the right hand of God. The language drawn from natural philosophy, which refers to the three-dimensional, space-time relations of substance and accidents (i.e., of real and merely apparently real components), is unable to adequately account for the supernatural coordinates of sacramental presence.



In St. Luke's account of the Transfiguration, Jesus manifests to Peter, James, and John in the Glorified Body that timelessly subsists at the right hand of the Father. This transcendence of time is signified in his conversation with Elijah and Moses, where "the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white" (9:29). Not only his body but his clothes are transfigured: the glorified fullness of his person is no longer divisible into the distinct elements of therefore, be captured in the "tabernacles" (9:33) that Peter offers to construct, any more than in the categories of natural philosophy (or, indeed, in merely human language).

The glorified body that is crucified, resurrected, and exalted to the right hand of the Father is shown to us in the Transfiguration to be inseparable and continuous with his human body. In his glorified body Christ, reveals the eternal unity he enjoys with the Father from before the world began: "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58).

I suggest that we are better served, when it has to do with the Mystery of the Sacraments, to rely on the spiritual categories of the salvation narrative of Holy Scripture (incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, glorification) than on the inherently dualistic terms of a merely rationalist metaphysics. It is on the Patristic tradition, the age of the "true philosophy" of the Church, that we must rely, rather than exclusively on the rationalist hermeneutics of modern Biblical criticism, as necessary and useful as they can be in their proper context.

St Thomas' intention to defend and explicate the Real Presence was admirable, but it has obscured our understanding of the Eucharist as a sacrifice of thanksgiving in *anamnesis* of the full dispensation of Christ's own self-offering, to which we respond in the Eucharistic Celebration with the offering of our own bodies "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom. 12:1), which is our "worship in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).



Reflections on Luke 12:16-21

By
Jay Van Nostrand, OCCO/Obl

We are grateful to Oblate Jay for his service to our wonderful Religious Order.

I have been blessed throughout my life with excellent health. I've never been seriously injured and I've never had a life-threatening disease or serious chronic medical condition. The next night that I spend in a hospital will be my first (at least since I was a new-born). Until a recent bout with COVID, I couldn't tell you the last time I had to miss out on something I needed or wanted to do because of illness.

As I moved into my seventies, I became more aware of the simple fact that at some point something is going to take me out. But I didn't believe that it was going to happen anytime soon and I was confident that my remaining life would be measured in decades.

In that frame of mind, I had a hard time really understanding the Rule's instruction to: "Day by day remind yourself that you are going to die. (RB 4:47)." It struck me as sort of morbid, maybe a bit ghoulish and not really constructive or productive. After all, why dwell on something that I don't control and something that isn't going to happen any time soon?

But something happened last month that has brought me up short and made think some more and more deeply about that instruction.

I had some routine blood work done and the results indicated that I might, indeed, have a serious medical issue. I was referred to a specialist and I'm scheduled to have a biopsy next week as I'm writing this. The probability is high that the condition, if not curable, will be manageable and won't have a major impact on my life expectancy.

But I didn't know that until I met with the specialist. During those intervening days, I was thinking that maybe this could be immediately serious and that maybe I wouldn't have as much time left as I had been assuming. Was I being like the rich fool in the parable told Luke 12:16-21? ("You fool, this very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?")

I don't believe that St. Benedict is telling me that I should want to die, nor do I believe that he's telling me that I should be expecting to die at any moment. I do believe that he's telling me that I should always be ready to die.

Reminding myself that I am going to die is a way of leading me to understand that we should live each day diligently and faithfully as I can. For me, what that means is that if there's something I know I need to do or that if there's something that I know is the right thing to do, that I should doing those things with all my heart. I should not be waiting until the time is right, or until there is a better time or for whatever other reason I might come up with for delay. That way, when my life is demanded of me, I will be able to pass on knowing that I have done what I could to do to be who God wanted me to be and to do what He wanted me to do.



Prayer for Life By Janice, OCCO/Obl



My prayer life is a continuous dialogue with God throughout the day and many times in those wee hours of the night when sleep is elusive. However, there is a directed time each morning with a devotional aid. One of my favorites was a diary written by an Irish Christian, Amy Wilson-Carmichael, who was a missionary in India for 55 years. Its title, The Edges of His Ways, had entries everyday relating her experiences through scripture and prayer. The engaging reality of being in service at an orphanage in a foreign country with so little that she was accustomed to was very captivating and encouraging.

After reading the passage for the day, I would look up the scripture she was inspired to journal, and I read it in its entirety. I found it comforting to share in her life when my own was very chaotic and challenging and to have hope in that camaraderie. I wrote many prayers on the pages of Amy's book. Prayers of desperation to see a change in a family member, for healing, financial needs that seemed impossible. All scribbled on the inside covers and every spare spot without print.

Looking at it now, that companion is tattered and faded, but many of the prayers were answered. I am always amazed at how God works in our lives through others. The book had been a gift from someone who had been praying for me to grow in my belief that God is real, hears our prayers and answers us. Her care for me and the helpful guide of Amy Carmichael breathed a newness into me and set me up to follow Christ for life.



“Only God knows what I am feeling. My heart is bursting of love and joy. I feel strongly about life as a Cistercian monk. It is the perfect life. Thank you Abbot Oscar. You found me and God opened my ears. God bless you for ever Abbot Oscar.”

Welcome Postulant Jorge from Columbia, South America.



I am the youngest of a wealthy, hard working and powerful family of farmers. A Catholic practicing family.. I was very shy, quiet and a very good student. I was intrigued to follow a religious life.

My parents believed that I would be kidnapped by the guerrillas. Guards accompanied me to school. Eventually I was forced to leave Columbia to continue my studies. My life was a frightful experience

Years passed. I returned to Columbia to devote my life to nurse my elderly parents.

Through art I achieved a spotlight and applause, newspapers, magazines and TV shows but as much lighting and applause I received the more emptiness filled my heart.

My parents died.

That produced a huge need of kindness, love, and closeness to people but in the contrary that same need gave me darkness and monsters.

Finally, I let my heart hear the voice inside me. Sadly, the monastic doors were slammed at my face.

Also my family, my city, my friends, everyone thought that I was crazy for my desire to be a religious.

In that darkness of despair Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO reached out to me. He saw the monastic spirit within me. We communicated for several months. I prayed. The hope in my soul was quickened. I heard with the ear of my heart.

I warmly receive the love and respect of the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross.



**Praying Unceasingly
Problems and Solutions
by Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO**

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14. Prayer concerns
15. Spiritual direction
16. Reconciliation/Confession
17. Pray without ceasing
18. A Rule of Life
19. The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross

**Praying is the most important thing you can do.
download your *free* Pdf version at:
www.AbbotOscarJoseph.com**



The St. Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary

and

The St. Seraphim School of Orthodox Theology



St. Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary
welcomes students to a wide variety of degrees,
programs, and continuing educational opportunities.
Check our section at the Cistercian website or
www.StephenHarding.College for more information
and Application.

***Off Campus Study Programs, Something for Everyone
Students may enroll at any time.***

***You choose the Programs and Courses that best meet
Your goals.***

**Continuing Education, CE
Certificate of Studies and Advanced Studies, CS/CAS.
Bachelor of Theology, Th.B.
Master of Theology, Th.M.
Doctor of Theology, Th.D.
Honorary Doctorates D.D. or LL.D.**

**Saint Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary
is a Religious Order affiliated educational institution under
the authority of The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross, a 501
non-profit corporation. Our degrees are classified as
ecclesiastically accredited.**

“Indeed, it has been a great, fruitful experience to have studied at St. Stephen Harding Theological College and Seminary. I had finally attained one of my dreams, to have a theology doctorate, and I had done it thanks to the guidance and encouragement of the Abbot.”

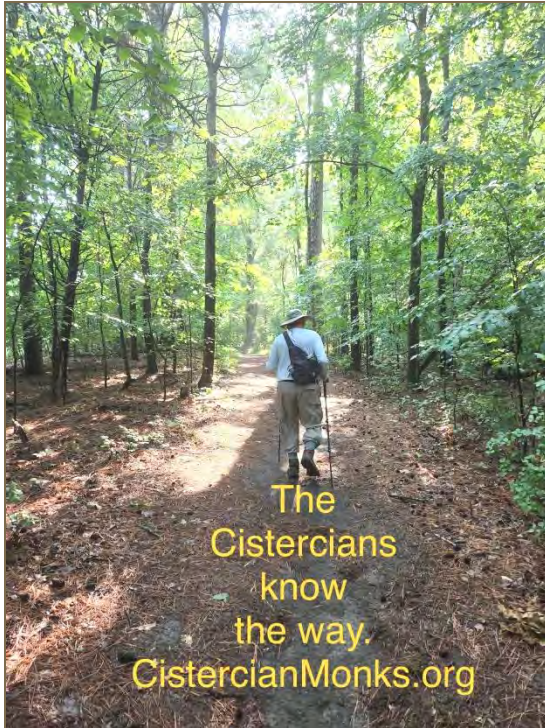
“A wonderful by-product of education at St. Stephen Harding is the relationship one can develop with the personalized focus. Frankly, I want to continue studying as a result and that’s the best compliment I can offer anyone involved with St. Stephen Harding, or any student considering the pursuit of a degree. Bravo! Rev Oscar Joseph, may God continue to bless your endeavors and seminary – they have certainly blessed me!”

“I am lead to boast about the education received as well as ‘free’ insight offered from the Abbot. I must admit, I wasn’t sure I could pull this off – a Master’s degree while juggling so many other things in life, but thanks to his gentle, always humorous guidance, I was able to realize a long term ambition.”



Spiritual Joy

How to live and maintain a joy filled prayer life.
By Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO



The
Cistercians
know
the way.
CistercianMonks.org

A short video series
Welcome to the Cistercian Order
What is a Monk?

Where do we go from here?
(How to Maintain a Prayerful Life)

The Rule of St. Benedict
Habit of Prayers

Protecting your vocation

Perfectionism
(Gold Medal Monk)

Lectio Divina
(Praying the Scriptures)

Building Courage and Charity through Humility

Stability
Obedience
Conversatio

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/9316848>

https://youtube.com/channel/UC8n9vm_1zLZ72ylj2RoH2Vg



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.”



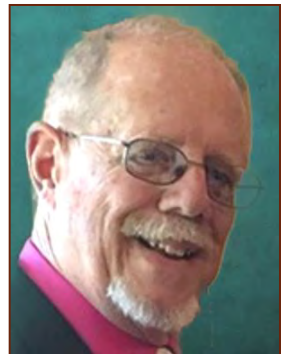
In loving memory of Br. Benedict and our love for the Cistercian Order we have founded

The “We Got Your Back Program” Four areas of support

- Spiritual Support
- Enrichment Support
- Making Life Easier Support
- Financial Support



These are Your Volunteers





Cistercian Oxford Long Sleeve Button-up Shirt (Men & Ladies Fit)



Cistercian Polo Shirt (Men & Ladies Fit)



Cistercian Fitted V-Neck Shirt (Men & Ladies Fit)



Cistercian Unisex 1/4 Zip Sweatshirt

The Cistercian Shop is open and doing business.

Find it on our website:

www.CistercianMonks.org



Cistercian Shield Decal / Sticker

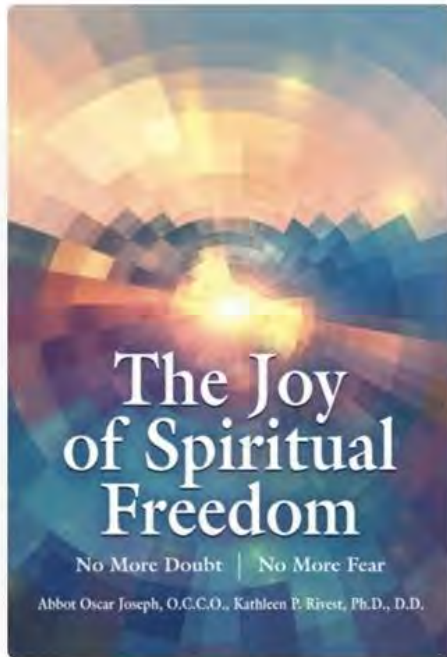
The Shop is reserved only for our members, oblates, their families, benefactors and friends of the Order. It is not available to the general population.



Cistercian Coffee Mug



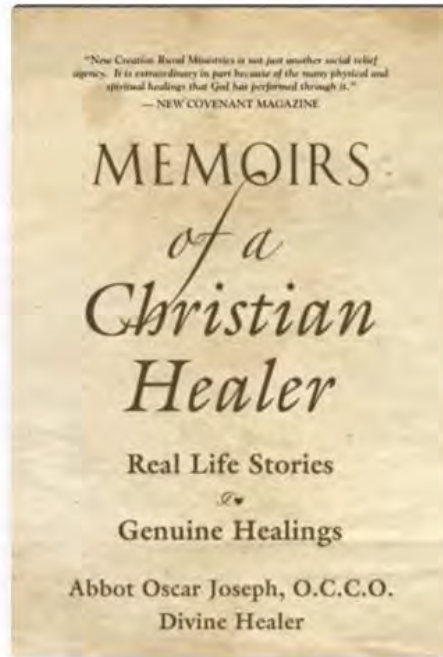
One option for each cup placed on both sides of cup



The Joy of Spiritual Freedom

No More Doubts | No More Fear

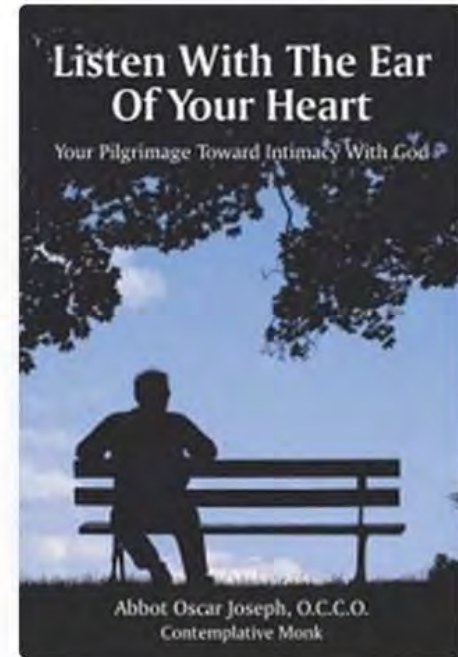
The Joy of Spiritual Freedom is the first of a trilogy that leads and inspires the reader to enter into a joy-filled relationship with a loving God. It is grounded in Biblical wisdom revealing how to remove debilitating doubt and fear. It draws from inspirational letters and case studies that illustrate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

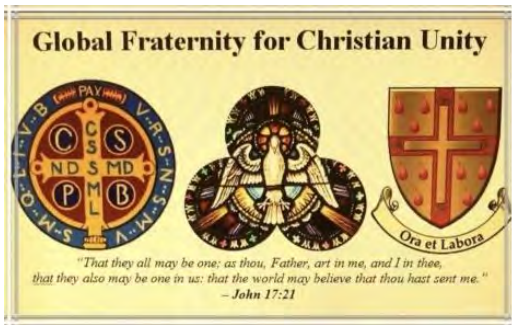


Listen with the Ear of Your Heart

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 and the FREE Companion books go to:
www.AbbotOscarJoseph.com**



A Beacon of Hope
@abbotprays

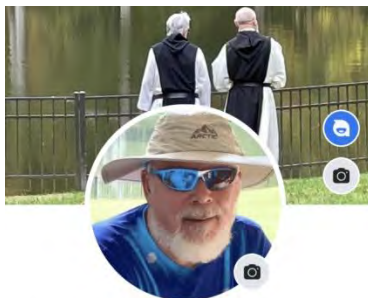
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The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross
@CistercianMonks



Priory of the Holy Eucharist
@HolyEucharistPriory



Abbot Oscar Joseph



Trinity Chapel
@TrinityChapelLNK



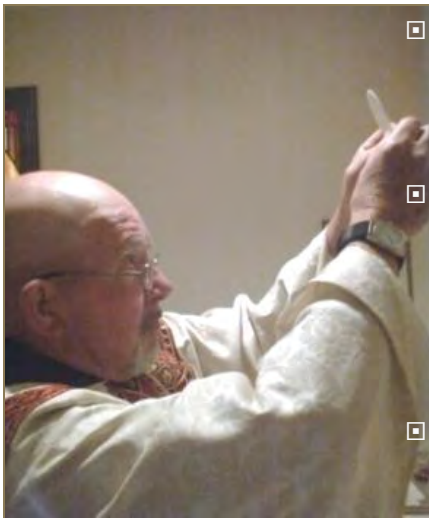
Saint Alberic's Church
@StAlbericsChurch



Monks make great Priests



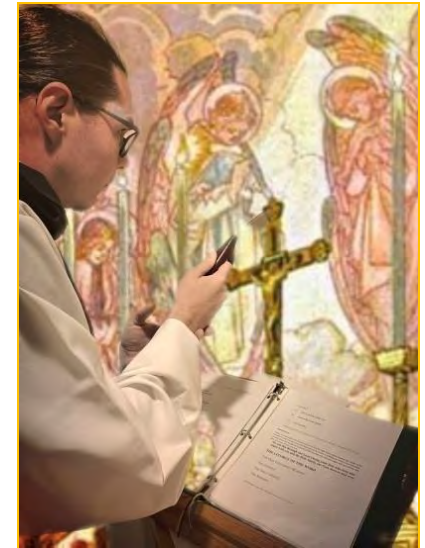
The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross is happy to receive male applicants for Holy Orders, Priests. We would also consider incardination for other rightfully ordained clerics.



While we require the traditional qualifications for ordination/incardination, the 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.



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.**



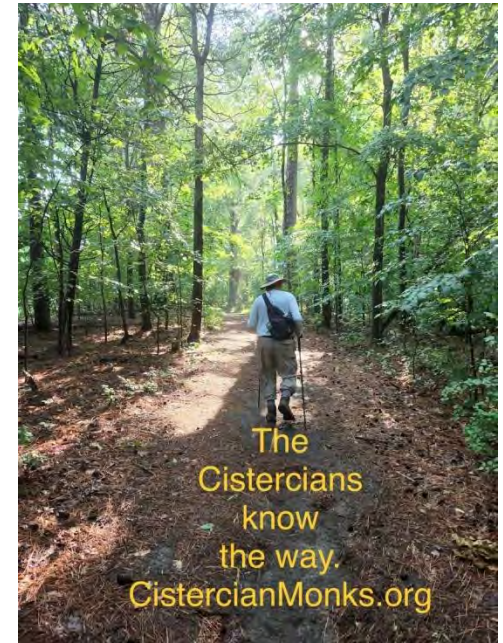
I have a question for you.

Come hike with me.



Do you want more of God

and less of stress?



The Cistercians know the way.
CistercianMonks.org



The journey is joy filled.

We will help you.

CistercianMonks.org



For more information

Not everyone should be a monk but everyone is called to the life of an Oblate

CistercianMonks.org

or email

Abbot Oscar Joseph ,OCCO
abbot@BellSouth.net



Email me NOW
You can be a Monk or an Oblate

Abbot@BellSouth.Net

Abbot Oscar Joseph,OCCO

Attention Seekers

One fashion or another, we are all seekers. We seek safety, security, love, and community. It is easy enough to know when what seek has been achieved. Seeking a Godly life and doing His perfect seems fraught with confusion and often despair. That need not be the case.

Scripture and tradition are filled with direction. Essentially, God calls each of us to seek perfection and holiness. Unfortunately, we make it difficult to understand and practice because we fill the journey with unrealistic expectations.

Some of us want God to speak directly to us. Others wish to receive a level of peace and certainty. And most want the short easy road to perfection and holiness. Let us use common sense and reason.

Scripture is clear. God wants every one of us to seek perfection and holiness. It is reasonable that He would provide the grace to empower us and a methodology whereby plain folks can achieve the seemingly impossible. We can conclude that our role is to cooperate with God's grace.

We use the Holy Rule of Saint Benedict to aid in developing a lifestyle that sets the stage for our Godly cooperation. We can teach you how to do the same.

Read the information and listen to the videos. It all makes perfect sense. For more information go to our website. If you want to join, the application is on the website. Blessings.

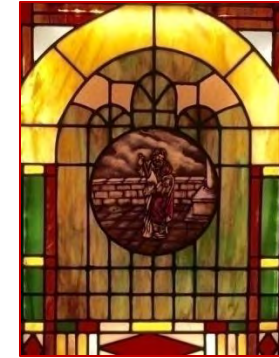
- 1. *Consecrating to a religious life and live outside of a community. (Living your life at home with a loving family and good employment can make becoming a monk easier than living in a monastery.)***
- 2. *Third order oblate program. (There is less required with this option. You can begin here if you like and move up to monk formation later.)***
- 3. *Supporting men with a call to the diaconate and priesthood through ordination, or incardination. (Men, single or married can be ordained. Ask the Abbot for more information.)***
- 4. *Associates: Religious communities (residential or dispersed), jurisdictions, parishes, small or home based communities, or individual(s) who desire to be under our Abbatial and Episcopal oversight and be autonomous. (Visitors) Requirements can be flexible and dependent upon a group's or an individual's application.***



<https://youtube.com/shorts/VHGkyyT5d>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEgDX7eh1xQ>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y28MRtRBx8o>



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.

- 1. Consecrating to a religious life and live outside of a community*
- 2. Third order oblate program.*
- 3. Supporting men with a call to the diaconate and priesthood through ordination, or incardination*
- 4 Associates: Religious communities (residential or dispersed), jurisdictions, parishes, small or home based communities. or individual(s) who desire to be under our Abbatial and Episcopal oversight and be autonomous. (Visitors) Requirements can be flexible and dependent upon a group's or an individual's application.*

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One doesn't enter the religious state because he is holy but because he wants to become holy.

*For more information contact
Abbot@bellsouth.net*