



43 years
Ora et Labora
Cistercian Order
of the
Holy Cross

Obsculta

“Listen with the ear of your heart.”

June 2024

“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



Below are some quotes that I hope will
inspire you.
Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO



Joy is an interior condition that transcends the immediate and brings stability to the individual.

Joy is not influenced by our success or failures.

Joy is not the absence of troubles or difficulties.

Joy helps us to focus on our true situation and to overcome adversity.

Joy is the product of having interior peace.

Joy is the fruit of a sustained Godly relationship.

Spiritual is a focus upon God's presence.

Spiritual is giving rightful importance to emotional health.

Spiritual is giving rightful importance on the material world.

Freedom is giving of ourselves over to God, a Supreme Being.

Freedom is other centered.

Freedom is the ability to overcome adversity.

Doubt is a product of self focus.

Doubt is a product of defining our reality according to our definitions.

Doubt is a product of making ourselves gods.

Fear is a consequence of the failure of our self definitions.

Fear is a consequence of our emotional and social isolation.

Fear is a consequence of our lack of realizing God's loving presence.

From: The Joy Of Spiritual Freedom



Revelations at the Baseball Field

By

Janice Joy Ariza, OCCO/Obl

Revelations at the Baseball Field

I spend many hours at the Little League field watching, cheering, encouraging and waiting for my grandson. He is such an enthusiastic player and since it means so much to him, my life is often centered on practicing and sporting goods stores. Learning the language of the plays and the game in general has created some humorous dialog between us because he knows all about it and I don't. Kind of like walking with God – we want to support others and often find out it takes a lot more than we planned.

One particular moment I had not planned on was a great reveal as to why I continue spending most of my free time driving and sitting around these ball fields with dozens of kids and their families. The game was scheduled for 5:30pm at a new location. I was already rushing to get from work to pick up my young athlete and find this new place. He ran ahead once we arrived, and I was left to drag the chair and other gear I would need for the next three hours. Finally, my place near the field was secured, and I settled in to wait for the first pitch. My mood was a bit heavy, so I began to pray a feeble little prayer for help to endure this ordeal.

God's answer to me came in the most loving way. A beautiful spring breeze surrounded me and calmed my irritation. As I was collecting my thoughts and resting in this God-sent moment, my grandson waved from first base and smiled. That smile has carried me through many tough, discouraging moments when I have been ready to give up. God shows up in the most perfect ways.



God's Presence and Action

By

Jay Van Nostrand, OCCO/Obl

One of the recurring themes in my spiritual formation has been learning to trust God. It's a theme that I come back to often as I learn that I need to bring to Him what I can and do what I can with an open and sincere heart. When I do that and when I avoid thinking and acting as if all depends on me, He can and will provide in ways beyond anything I can ask for or imagine.

At my home church I take turns with two other men leading a time of prayer every Wednesday morning. The first time I led I planned a contemplative session; focusing on what God might have to say to us as opposed to what we want to say to God. I planned to open with Psalm 95, continue with a responsive reading based on our Cistercian daily prayer and move into an abbreviated lectio divina exercise based on Mark 2:1-12 (Jesus heals the paralyzed man). We would finish by offering the Lord's Prayer together. I felt good about the plan and was all set and ready to go.

When I arrived at the church sanctuary, where the prayer time would take place, there was a song playing through the sound system. Unbeknownst to me, one of the attendees, a woman of great faith and amazing empathy, heard the song the day before and felt led to share it. She tracked down our music minister that morning and persuaded him to have it playing as the group gathered. In addition, she is a natural calligrapher and handwrote the lyrics to the song and had copies for everyone. And, of course, the lyrics meshed perfectly with the Gospel story.

As part of the lectio divina, I gave everyone a chance to share what came up for them either personally or for the church. The group was small but virtually everyone shared something. One person was brought to tears by a connection she made to a difficult family situation.

While going through this experience and afterwards I had a strong sense of God's presence and action in what took place that morning. He took what I started, expanded on it and used it to touch and move those present in ways beyond anything I had in mind. It was a wonderful object lesson for me in what can happen when I trust in God and when I'm open to His leading.

The Abbot asks, What is your passion?

During one of my retreats, a retreatant asked me, "Why is it that when we are in trouble, we reach out to God?" My response was simple, "When we are in trouble, we know more than usual that we really need God."

The retreatant agreed then asked why, when I am in trouble, God does not respond to my prayers?" I replied, "God always responds, but if we do not know Him well, we are the ones who cannot respond or hear Him. Spending a few minutes in daily prayer while driving to work is not "Lifting our hearts and minds to God."

Nearly every time I interview a Cistercian inquirer and briefly describe our excellent formation program, I hear, "I don't have enough time." Naturally, I want to give him an hour's sermon on how God is pursuing Him and has commanded each of us to be Holy. That being the case, God would also give us the grace, courage, and charity to respond to His call and become holy.

Sometimes, even our dear Cistercians tell me the same thing: I don't have enough time. I am overwhelmed with other responsibilities.

I do not hear such things from people who have ordered life and are not victims of the urgency of the immediate. These people have developed a Passion for God. I offer you a condensed version of an article on Godly passion that might motivate each of us.

Cultivating a Passion for God

PETER AMSTERDAM

One of our core values is passion for God. "We love God with our hearts, souls, minds, and strength. We seek a close personal relationship with Jesus, and to grow in emulating His attributes and living His love."¹

Passion for God is a powerful statement. One of the definitions of passion is intense enthusiasm for something, a keen interest in something. So when we say that we have passion for God, we're stating that we have an intense enthusiasm for God, a keen interest in Him. Some synonyms for passion are excitement, zeal, delight, fervency, desire, hunger, thirst, craving, conviction, drive. When we say we are passionate for God, we are speaking in terms of having desire, hunger, thirst, a craving for Him.—That we have zeal and drive, fervency and excitement, and of course, love.

(Continued on the next page)



The Abbot asks, What is your passion? Continued

God is so passionate about being in relationship with us that He sent His only Son, Jesus, to sacrificially lay down His life through His death on the cross in order to bridge the gap between Himself and humanity. That's how much He loves us. That's how much He wants to be in relationship with us. He's passionate about humanity. He's passionate about you. He's passionate about all of us. And we feel the same passion about being in relationship with Him. As the verse says, "We love Him, because He first loved us."³ We could rephrase this concept to say that we are passionate for Him because He was first passionate for us. We mirror His passion.

Our love for Him results in our desire to build a deep relationship with Him, and putting effort into strengthening that relationship is something that we have to do. As such, we are committed to spending time communicating with Him through prayer, reading His Word, listening to Him as He speaks to us, and paying attention to what He says. He is an integral part of our lives, and what He says to us matters.

As we develop our relationship with Him, we get to know Him better, and as we do we start to become more like Him. We begin to understand what He likes and doesn't like, and we make an effort to do those things which please Him, and as we do, we begin to change. Being in relationship with Him changes us.

One of our goals, as followers of Jesus, is to imitate Christ. We want to take on His nature and attributes. As we grow in our relationship with Him, we become better people—we exhibit godly attitudes, we have godly ethics, we have integrity, we live His words. As we grow to be more like Him, He shines through us, and when He does—when others see us imitating Him—whether they know it or not, they are seeing something of God.

How can we cultivate such a close relationship with God? By:

- Giving time and priority to the relationship.
- Reading and meditating on God's Word.
- Having regular communication with God in prayer.
- Obeying God's Word and the things He tells us to do.
- Having a clean heart through regularly confessing and asking for forgiveness for our sins.
- Seeking to glorify Him by our commitment to follow Him as we seek His purpose and will for our lives.
- Discovering what is important to God and making those things important to us.

Passion isn't passive. Being passionate about something means you're going to do something about it. Passion results in action. We who are passionate about God are active for God. We carve out time for God, whether that means getting up earlier in the morning to make that time possible or sacrificing some activity that we enjoy. We make choices that strengthen our close friendship with Him. If you want that passion, ask God daily to give it to you. It's a prayer that He delights to answer.

And remember, deep love develops over time. As we see God's faithfulness to us in our daily lives, His touches of love and blessing, His supply of our needs, and particularly His grace and sustaining power during times of trial and affliction, our love and trust for Him grows stronger.

For more writings by Peter Amsterdam, visit [Directors Corner](#).

Footnotes

¹ From [TFI's Core Values](#).

² Mark 12:28–30 ESV.

³ 1 John 4:19 KJV.

⁴ Isaiah 54:5; Romans 7:4 paraphrased; Isaiah 62:5.

Contemplation 1 of 2

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.

Contemplation 2 of 2

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 six diversions are not insurmountable problems for those committed to contemplation. In fact, awareness of any one of these six 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.



KATHLEEN, PH.D., D.D.

MARIAN SCHOLAR
PUBLISHED AUTHOR
TV AND RADIO PERSONALITY



Mary: Our Cistercian Role Model

Adhering to the three fundamental principles of Cistercian life – obedience, stability, and conversion – is easier said than done. As soon as rules are implemented, rebellion rises up within us. We insist on our own way. We are discontented with our circumstances and search for “greener pastures.” We are impatient with our lives and with other people. We say we want to be truly converted but insist on placing limits on the amount of conversion we will endure. We say we trust God but defy the authorities he sends us. We fight the essence of genuine love.

The vow of obedience requires that Cistercians live in accordance with the Rule of St. Benedict and fulfill all demands required by lawful superiors. Our Lady showed her obedience during her married life by trusting St. Joseph to protect and provide for her. When Joseph told her to prepare for immediate travel to Egypt, she did so. Later in life she trusted her son, then St. John, to protect and provide for her. She lived at peace with God while her physical and spiritual needs were met.

For us also the blessings of obedience are that of peace, protection and provision. Stability means dedication to the Trinity and remaining with the Cistercian community. Mary’s stability began with her dedication to following God. At the Incarnation she became connected to the second person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, and indissolubly united with Jesus. She was at his side during all his earthly life, from cradle to grave. She never abandoned the call God gave her. After her son ascended, Mary became mother to St. John and maintained her support to her son’s community. While her geography changed, and the people whom she encountered changed, Mary remained dedicated to the role chosen for her. Consequently, she became the Mother of the Church and Queen of the Angels.

Conversion is an ongoing process by which we commit ourselves to the vocation, are open to growth and change, and earnestly follow the gospel of Jesus Christ. Like us, Mary’s conversion was not that of being converted from paganism to monotheism. She did not have to be convinced or converted to give her life to God. Rather, her beliefs had to adapt to the reality of Jesus as Messiah.

Many before Mary considered what the Messiah would do for Israel. Some thought he would be a political king who would rule in the traditional way of kings. By the time of the wedding at Cana, Mary had been at Jesus’ side for about 30 years. She was converted. She understood Jesus’ heart and mind. She knew he would help the people at the wedding party. She also understood that she had earned the privilege of her son’s consent to her request. The blessing of persevering in conversion for us is that of knowing our Lord’s heart and mind and confidence that he will answer our prayers.

When we consider the human struggles that come into play as we attempt to become obedient, loving children, Our Lady’s example is even more impressive. A fully human woman, she lived a life of obedience, stability and conversion. She is both proof that the accomplishment of Cistercian ideals is possible, and a help for us in our efforts when asked.

Br. Jorge Enrique Botero, OCCO
Columbia, SA

Welcome to the Novitiate



My experience of giving my Novice vows.

Levitating to say the least.

I feel cleaner and much so as I wear my holy habits. I feel powerful but not in the human sense. Power to fulfill God's commands. I am more aware of God's love for us; the green in the prairies are greener now; how the chickens plumage help me with her beauty and their curious gossiping interaction with me and their love for adventure in my patio; the main ladies, the cows, showing proudly their calves and the proud bulls protecting them. The horses, mares and their foals running freely in the prairies. The birds on the trees happily praising God with their eloquent variety of songs throughout the entire day until early night.

My heart beats in a different rate, it feels twinkling every time it pumps blood.

My stomach has butterflies after my Father picked me like a young princess when hears the King calling her.

My brain is very excited waiting God's orders to fulfill.

My mouth scream love (Agape Love) to my King.

My back, arms and legs ready to carry more than 2000 years of traditions, prayers, sacrifices, holiness, beauty, miracles.

As I wear my holy habits whit such a bright white blinding my eyes. A black scapular a remainder of all those black dark days from my past. Forgotten by now.

My face lights up with joy.

No fear just happiness and joy.

My life becomes a wonderful place to be and enjoy.

Thank you to both God my Holy Father and my Abbot.

In the heart of Ghana, stands Archbishop Edward Minnah—a beacon of faith and compassion. I know this because late last year I met Bishop Edwards in Winston Salem NC. We dined several times and had lengthy discussions.

Both Bishop Edward and his leadership have long been interested in the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross and wished to be able to join us, be trained, and make the Benedictine/Cistercian way available to his jurisdiction.

Sometime later he sent us his application and various papers, and we were pleased to accept him into postulancy.

It is our sincere hope that He will be a shining light and an icon of Cistercian hope to his people.

Arch Bishop Edward Minnah
Ghana
Welcome to Postulancy



Welcome Zack to Oblate/Postulancy

I was born in 1959 in Buffalo, NY. I grew up in a family of 5 siblings in a Polish, Roman Catholic community. I lived in Buffalo until I went on active duty in the Army in 1986. I medically retired from the Army in September 2011.

Before retiring, I began my studies as a Chaplain, graduating with a Master of Divinity and completing my certification as a Public Safety Chaplain in December 2013.

I traveled the country for the next several years, looking for a place to start a new life. I traveled to Christ in the Desert Monastery, New Mexico, and began a 2-year discernment on being a Benedictine Oblate. In 2021, I took my Oblate vows

In the summer of 2022, I moved to Charlotte, and in the fall of 2022, I began my theology studies at Belmont Abbey College.

I pray with the Brothers at Belmont Abbey, work as a volunteer Veteran Service Officer, and study to earn a Cistercian spirituality certificate at Saint Stephen College.

I have been accepted into the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross Oblate program. The pragmatic Cistercian spirituality resonates with my spirit.

I look forward to becoming an active member of the order and, in the process, fulfilling my Oblate life filled with prayer, work, and study.



Welcome Darryl to Postulancy

My name is Darryl, and I am a new Postulate in the OCCO.

I am a 59-year-old, married man, retired from a 20-year career as a Registered Respiratory Therapist.

At various times in my life, I have also been an over the road truck driver, a Licensed Massage Therapist, and a real estate agent.

I was baptized as a 13 year old boy in the First Baptist Church. As I grew older, I fell away from my Christian faith as many teenagers do and began what would become a life long spiritual search.

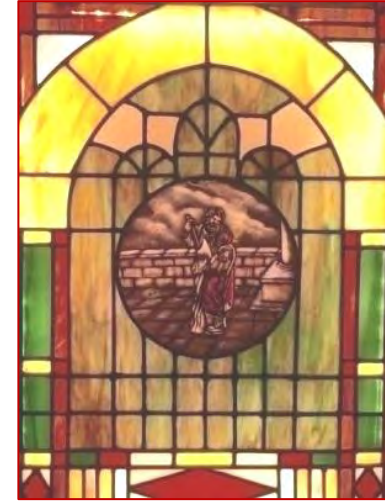
I studied various philosophies and religions, all to no avail. At a certain point I realized that I had never truly studied the Christianity of my youth from an adult, serious perspective. I began studying church history and the writings of the early church fathers, which led me to Catholicism. I became so in love with Jesus that I thought I had a vocation to the priesthood.

At one point I suggested to my superior that we should start a religious brotherhood and, much to my surprise he named me the Abbot. While researching similar organizations I came upon the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross and contacted Abbot General Oscar Joseph, who invited me to enter Postulancy. After much prayer and listening to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, I decided to join.





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.**



Set The Captives Free

*"God himself will set me free
from the hunter's snare."
"From those who would trap me
with lying words and from the hunter's snare."*

By

The Most Rev. Abbot Oscar Joseph, Ph.D., D.S.T., OCCO

www.AbbotOscarJoseph.com



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



Cistercian Life

The Benedictine/Cistercian values will help you contemplate the real meaning and experience a simple life of utmost good and happiness in your present day, time, and circumstance.

The following pages are intended to motivate you in your spiritual growth by illustrating God's call to everyone toward holiness and how the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross will help you to respond to God's grace in your call to the Oblature or a Monastic.

These pages also present brief but helpful and inspiring information explaining the Rule of St. Benedict and how you can apply it to develop a lifestyle more responsive to and blessed by God.

Our wonderful, tireless Abbot frequently writes life enhancing materials which are available to everyone.

**You find the free PDF downloads at:
www.AbbotOscarJoseph.com**



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

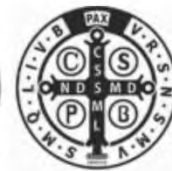


Cistercian Shield Decal / Sticker

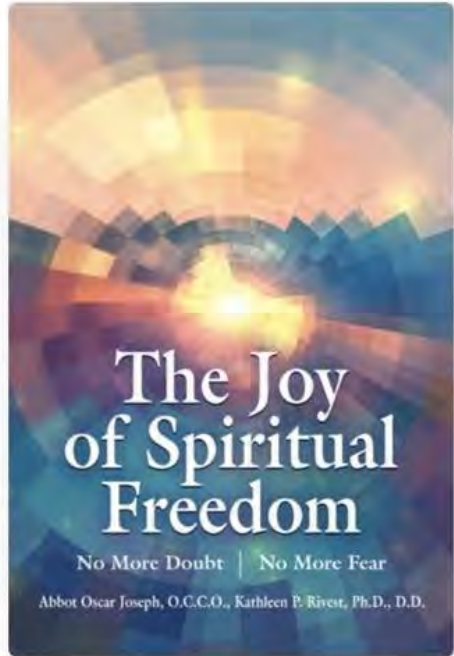
The Shop is reserved only for our members, oblates, their families, benefactors and friends of the Order. It is not available to the general population.



Cistercian Coffee Mug



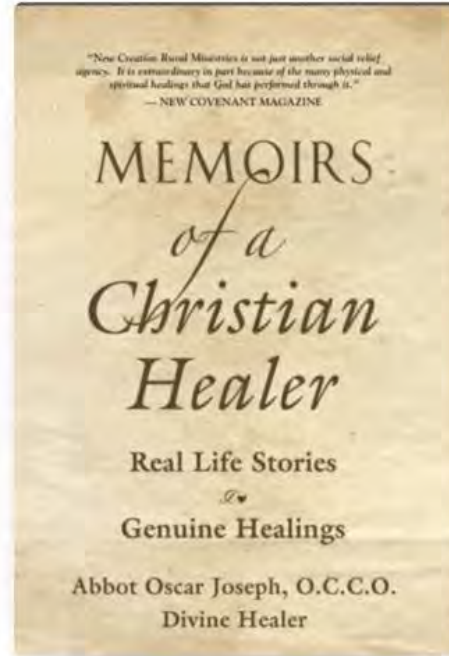
One option for each cup placed on both sides of cup



The Joy of Spiritual Freedom

No More Doubts | No More Fear

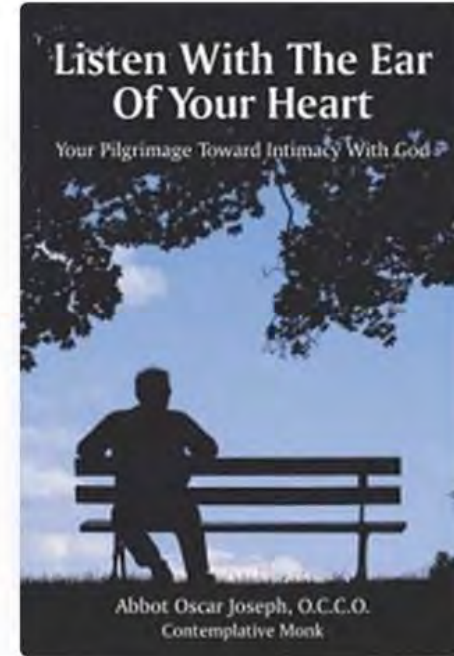
The Joy of Spiritual Freedom is the first of a trilogy that leads and inspires the reader to enter into a joy-filled relationship with a loving God. It is grounded in Biblical wisdom revealing how to remove debilitating doubt and fear. It draws from inspirational letters and case studies that illustrate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

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 will 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.

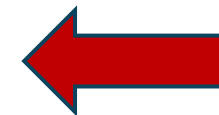
We use the Holy Rule of Saint Benedict to aid in developing a lifestyle that sets the stage for our Godly cooperation. We can teach you how to do the same.

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/VHGkyT5d>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KEgDX7eh1xQ>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y28MRtRBx8o>



CISTERCIAN ORDER OF THE HOLY CROSS, COMMON OBSERVANCE



43 years

Ora et Labora

**Cistercian Order
of the
Holy Cross**



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.*

"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."

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