



Obsculta

"Listen with the ear of your heart."

September 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

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Dear Cistercians and Friends,

As the Abbot General, I hold many fancy titles, but the ones I cherish the most are Monk and Servant Leader, one who makes another's dreams come true. The characteristics of a Cistercian servant leader include:

1. Empathy: Understanding and sharing the feelings of others.
2. Listening: Valuing others' perspectives and actively listening to their concerns.
3. Healing: Helping others overcome personal and professional challenges.
4. Awareness: Being mindful of oneself and the environment.
5. Persuasion: Influencing others through gentle, non-coercive means.
6. Conceptualization: Seeing beyond day-to-day realities to envision the bigger picture.
7. Foresight: Anticipating future outcomes based on past experiences.
8. Stewardship: Taking responsibility for the well-being of the organization and its members.
9. Commitment to the growth of people: Investing in the personal and professional development of others.
10. "Building a community": Fostering a sense of belonging and collaboration.

Sounds like something that St. Benedict would say.

Often when I place my hands on someone, thus blessing them, they have been a recipient of servant leadership.

Earlier today, someone who visited our home was complaining of a painful migraine headache. I invited her to prayer. In just moments, the pain was vastly removed.



With that example in mind, I thank Jay and Lance, other Cistercian leaders, for their servant leadership.

Perhaps we could all be servant leaders, icons of hope, for those around us.



Prior Jorge, OCCO, Columbia, South America

Visits the Abbot General

And the Chapter in Winston Salem N.C.

Prior Jorge, OCCO wrote:

I recently spent six days totally embedded into my new family, my new life and especially into my Abbot's home/life and routine and all the love-care-spiritual knowledge-daily which the Abbot gave me as my Spiritual Father.

Abbot Oscar taught me to receive. My heart gets it, but my brain refuses to understand it. How can someone besides our Father-God and Jesus and our Holy Mary Mother of God can give (continually and consistently) so much love and understanding as Abbot Oscar to everyone we met.

Abbot made me feel important, valuable, needed and loved.

I received one of the biggest expressions of love, care, and respect. Thank you. After God's love is yours dear Abbot.

Finally, I realized that after all the love I got, all the great experiences I lived, all the knowledge I received from the Abbot "I learned to receive."

Thank you, God and Father, thank Jesus my Lord, thank you my Holy Mother Mary Mother of God, thank you the Holy Spirit, thank you my loving Abbot Oscar Joseph, thank you Mrs. Kathleen, thank you my loving brothers Jay and Lance.

Pat, I hope that I brought some light and hope to your difficulties.

Br. Jorge, OCCO has accepted the position as Prior for the Priory of St. Joseph the Worker. His mission is to be an icon of hope for the poor In his region. We are very proud of him.



St. Francis Springs Prayer Center

Prior and the Abbot spent an entire day at the Prayer Center.

They were warmly welcomed and met some old friends and made some new friends.

Some asked them for a blessing.

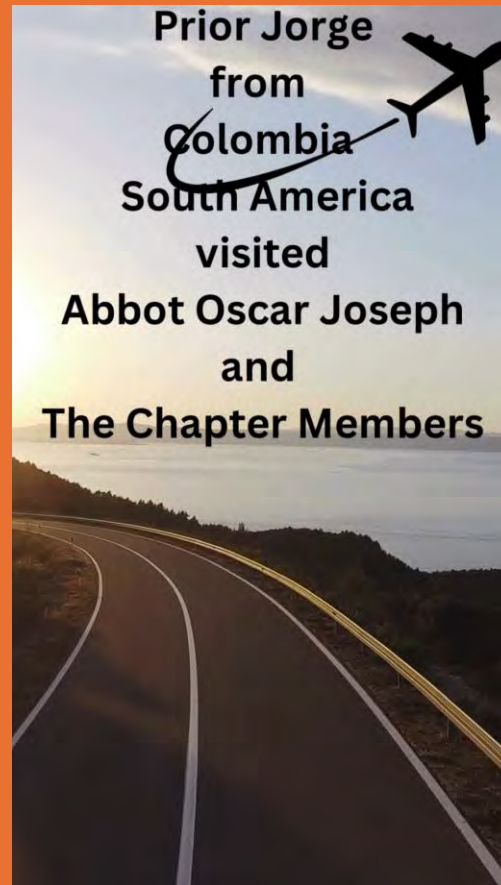
They walked two miles viewing several sacred places.

It was a day of blessings.





Prior Jorge, OCCO



St Francis Prayer Center

<https://youtu.be/ubFOQEtB4cM>



You can have your local Chapter.

We enjoy participating in our Chapter meetings.

Chapters are NOT group therapy or a Scripture study. It is studying and finding the application of The Rule of St. Benedict and helping each other integrate that into our lives.

Any adult from any Christian background, male or female, can participate in a Chapter. Chapter leaders do not have to be St. Benedict experts. Nor do you have to be a Cistercian Monk or Oblate.

We have the book list with exercises for home use. We will coach you. All you need to do is gather up three or more of your friends or neighbors. We will help with the rest. Just email the Abbot at abbot@bellsouth.net

Not long ago, I had three couples in a Chapter. Look at this short video to see how excited they were. Your group will be as exciting.

<https://youtu.be/F4zG8rn81I4>





**A better life begins
and ends
with a truly intimate
relationship
with God.**

**Come visit with me
and learn
how to have real joy
with your
creator.**

Abbot@bellsouth.net



What we have given to others.

<https://youtu.be/y28MRtRBx8o>

Description of the Cistercians

<https://youtu.be/vh6OG8bn3Al>



Advice on Retreats

by

Jay Van Nostrand, OCCO/Obl



It has been my privilege to go on two personal retreats at the St. Francis Springs Prayer Center (where our Convocation was held earlier this year). Our Celtic brothers and sisters speak of “thin places,” where heaven and earth are especially close together. In that sense St. Francis Springs is one of the thinnest places I know of anywhere on this earth and I love being there whenever I can.

In the days leading up to my first personal retreat, in late August of last year, I wanted to make sure that I would use the time wisely and well and I spent hours thinking and planning out what I was going to pray about and what I hoped to hear from God in the process. In the midst of all my busyness, I somehow heard or sensed that I was going about it all wrong. That I really had no business trying to control what kind of experience I would have, nor could I possibly predict how God would use the time or even if He would have anything to do with me at all.

I recalled our Abbot’s teaching that the time we spend in prayer is our gift to God and that what, if anything, He might make or do with that time is up to Him. In that spirit, I stopped planning what I was going to pray about and for and gave up analyzing and assessing what I thought I might receive. (Interestingly, once I did that, I was much more relaxed. Giving up trying to be in control and the burden of responsibility for the outcome was liberating.)

My first retreat experience was beyond anything I could have asked or imagined. Exactly what I did and how I experienced God’s presence are topics for another discussion. But suffice it to say that I obtained clarity around some issues that had been troubling me, including some that I was only dimly aware of beforehand. I came away with a heightened awareness of God’s presence in my life and keener insights as to how He was working in and through me in all areas of my life. That awareness and those insights carried over into my marriage, and into my work in my home church and in our order.

So, I was eager to go back to St Francis Springs when I had a chance to do so at the beginning of August. I had been focused for several weeks on praying meditating and contemplating on who God wants me to be and what He wants me to do at this point in my life. I was very much looking forward to the experience and was eagerly anticipating the fresh awareness and insights that I was confident I would receive.

And I did have a wonderful time of rest, prayer, meditation and contemplation. But I came away with a vague sense of uneasiness that I had somehow missed something. I felt I had been in God’s presence but without a sense that anything important had been revealed or that anything meaningful was going to change.

When I got back home, I started sharing my experiences with my wife. After listening to me for a while she made the observation that it sounded to her that this retreat was more about me and less about God. That comment was like a flashbulb going off in a dark room where suddenly and for a split second, everything was illuminated and clear.

Continued next page



Continued
Advice on Retreats
by
Jay Van Nostrand, OCCO/Obl

I realized that I had been thinking and behaving as if I could control the direction and pace of my spiritual formation. I had subtly forgotten that God initiates, and we respond. It's not up to me to decide who He wants me to be and what He wants me to do. It is up to me to be aware of His presence and to, as best I am able, put myself in a position to hear the promptings and leadings of the Holy Spirit and then have the courage to respond accordingly.

I began reviewing my retreat experience and realized that He was really guiding me to relax and submit and let Him work in my life. That I wasn't and could not be in control and that acting as if I needed to be in charge was getting in the way of what He is trying to do in and through me. I'm praying that I'll receive the grace and have the humility to empty myself so that He can work His will in and through me.

Why Worry When You Can Pray? (Notes to Myself) by Oblate Linda, OCCO/ObI

Jesus was very kind and very tactful when He asked, "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?" (Matthew 6:27-34) Jesus could have pointed a finger at me and asked, "Linda, can you by taking thought add one cubit to your stature?" I am glad He didn't do that! I struggle with chronic worry that can often lead to anxiety, and stress that can diminish the quality of my life. Do you?

Now, I am very short. I have wondered what it would be like to be taller. Worrying surely won't accomplish the desired change! Seriously, though, if I want to grow spiritually, worrying won't get the job done any more than worrying will help me to become 5'7"! It is a no-brainer--- I should stop worrying because it accomplishes nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. So, the answer to Jesus' rhetorical question is..... "Not me, Jesus, I can't add to my stature by worrying. OK, I will just stop it." HMMM. Easier said than done, at least for me.

Jesus could very well have just said, "Look, everyone, it's ridiculous to worry, so just stop it", but He didn't. BUT He did give us some obvious hints about just how silly it is to worry. Just think, Jesus compared us to sheep in several places in Scripture --- we are the sheep of His pasture, the Good Shepherd sought for the lost sheep, all we like sheep have gone astray. Not very flattering. What can we learn from this metaphor for, --- ahem - yes, a metaphor--- for you and for me.

Our imaginations run wild, like panicked sheep-- with no direction, no wisdom, and no gain. My go-to for this problem is simply using worrying as a prompt to move immediately into a posture of prayer. Yes, even a million times a day if necessary. Especially at the end of the day.

Our Heavenly Father has promised His faithful to supply all our needs according to His great riches in glory. He has given us everything we need for life. He even left a beautiful set of instructions to check out in Philippians 4, Yes, you guessed what they say! The instructions begin with "Be anxious for nothing." Um, in other words, don't have a life filled with worry. Our Lord loved us so much, He told us how silly it is to worry, He knew we would worry, and He left us Philippians 4 to tell us what to do instead. Those loving instructions say, "Pray. Don't worry." Our God loves us so much. He told us not to worry. He knew we would do it anyway. And then He left instructions, just in case. Why worry when you can pray?



Strengthening your prayer life is a beautiful journey that can transform your relationship with God.

Here are **12 practical ways**** to enhance your prayer experience:**

by Postulant Darryl



Set aside	1. **Consistent Time and Place** : Set aside a specific time and quiet location for prayer. Whether it's early morning, during lunch, or during your commute, prioritize communication with God.
Pray	2. **Spontaneous Prayer** : Pray throughout the day, not just during scheduled times. Be willing to pause and pray for others, even briefly. It doesn't have to be eloquent; sincerity matters.
Begin	3. **Start and End with Praise** : Begin your prayers by praising God. Don't rush into requests; let gratitude set the tone. End with praise too, acknowledging His greatness.
Read	4. **Let God Speak Through His Word** : Read Scripture before praying. Let God's Word guide your thoughts and inspire your prayers.
Focus on	5. **Spiritual Needs First** : Focus on spiritual needs before physical ones. Seek God's guidance, wisdom, and transformation.
Create	6. **Use a Prayer List** : Create a list of people and needs. It helps you remember and intercede for others.
Don't limit	7. **Unlimited Requests** : Don't limit your requests. God invites us to bring everything to Him in prayer.
Use	8. **Pray the Bible** : Use Scripture as a foundation for your prayers. Pray through Psalms, promises, and teachings.
Remember	Remember, prayer is a conversation with our loving Creator. These practical steps can deepen your connection and enrich your spiritual life.

From your Abbot General

These and other traps are dividing the Church. Unity is particularly important these days. Please do your own study using the free copy and pray for truth, change, and unity as we love and care for each other.

What entrapments hold even sincere Christians back from true intimacy with God? Why can't we readily see them, and where did they come from? There is much to say about these entrapments. Hang on, I am going deep into situations we have all struggled with and might still be struggling with. I will also teach how to be set free from those situations.

Get your free copy of ***Setting the Captives Free*** by going to www.AbbotOscarJoseph.com
Check out the Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross.
www.CistercianMonks.org

I have been blessed with many mystical experiences and revelations. Trying to describe God and those experiences is impossible. Trying to describe anything about God is beyond our reach. So, in our feeble attempt to define and understand God, we use metaphors, similes, and such. Worst yet, we make God from our image and likeness. We even give God a worldview that enhances our culture and is couched in a list of human emotions. Worst yet, we describe God with an immature emotional system like ours. God can be emotionally fickle, manipulative, condemning, difficult if not impossible to understand, and needs to satisfy himself emotionally.

We have heard and possibly used phrases such as,

"We must earn God's love by doing the impossible."

"God is described as a threat that you cannot escape."

"God will never give you more troubles than you can handle."

"God is testing you."

"God has given you troubling circumstances so you can get closer to Him. "

All these statements are false. They describe God as a trickster who plays with His people. They hold you back from trusting God. as a trickster who plays with His people. They hold you back from trusting God.

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by going to:
www.AbbotOscarJoseph.com

Contemplative distractions by Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO

In our June Obsculta we posted the entire article by *Br. Richard Simonelli* on distractions while praying. I was so impressed not only about the content but the down to earth approach. Let's face it we all have distractions. This article might have been born from a distraction during my morning prayers. Or perhaps it was the Holy Spirit.

I what to offer in this post is a brief summary of *Br. Simonelli's* article, some additions, and a solution.

Lately I have entered my morning prayer rather tired. Caffeine and more sleep were not affective. Falling asleep and dropping my prayer book was a common distraction.

I suspect that my ill health was the temporary cause. Nonetheless I was angrily distracted.

Distraction means that the focus of 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 I may be occupied by work-related issues.

Drama is the impediment to the contemplative life. drama of a personal relationship, or of personal issues. In any case, a dramatic mindset takes me away from the simple truth of contemplation.

Indulging the brilliant mind is also a detour to contemplation. In this case we get lost in the thinking process, the self always thinking.

The passionate heart is also another challenge to a life of true contemplation. The passionate heart is occupied with intense emotions or feelings.

Now the solution. After carefull research on its effectiveness, I had suggested this to my college students when they complained about being stuck in their research or creative process. They were surprised that it really worked.

I told them to go into a corner and jump up and down for several minutes. They thought I was crazy, but the fruits were amazing.

It might be more liturgical for us: to speak, sing, sit, stand, and kneel when prayer appropriate. Your distractions will disappear.

Fighting a negative thought with a positive thought hardly works. Rather make noise and move. That will do it.





KATHLEEN, PH.D., D.D.

Marian Scholar
Published Author
TV and Radio Personality



The Blessed Mother in Community

To be in community is to be in relationship with others. A community may consist of family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, residents of a town, or any group to which a person belongs. In the best community relationships faith is shared and celebrated.

The Blessed Virgin has always been seen in relationship to a community. When we first meet her in Scripture, Mary's community includes her Jewish family and relatives. That they are Jewish is important, in that Mary's Jewish faith and heritage is the key to all that she does. The Virgin was raised by Jewish parents in a Jewish community to believe in and honor the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Mary was part of a community who longed for the Messiah, God's chosen race. It is likely that she was part of the community of young Jewish women who dreamed of becoming the mother of the Messiah. When Gabriel announced God's intention to make Mary the mother of His Son, Mary made a decision that enlarged her community. This community became larger and larger, and would eventually include Gentiles, people considered unclean by Jewish standards.

When Jesus gave Mary to John at the Cross, Mary's community expanded again. Mary's community and role expanded through service to God. Through her unique Divine Maternity, she became the Mother of the Church, a community to which we belong today. Mary's Divine Maternity was and is holy. In fact, the Eastern Church refers to her as All Holy. However, Mary's community is not made up completely of holy, sinless people. She ministers to both saints and sinners, enjoining all to become part of her community, following the example of Jesus. As the personification of the Church, Mary is the reflection of the ideal community: faithful, obedient, generous, meek and fruitful. Her faithfulness allowed her to become the mother of God. Her obedience over time granted her a special place in God's plan of redemption, a position of unique honor. Her generous concern for others allows us access to her prayers and assistance. Her meekness allows God to work through her to accomplish His purpose. She is fruitful as she draws people to closer relationship with her Son, increasing the church community's numbers and holiness.

We are members of Mary's community, The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross. Mary is our mother, and we are precious to her. She cherishes us who are the recipients of grace petitioned for us by our father Benedict. Let us not be shy to ask for her help as we struggle toward personal and community holiness.

Why is it so difficult to receive from others and our Good Lord? Someone struggling with low self-esteem or self-worth might find it hard to accept validation even when it is given. They might doubt its sincerity or feel undeserving.

by **Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO**

The Solution

Let us call it God's esteem

Think about this... We have been taught that self-esteem is vital to our happiness and is gained by acquiring things, positions, and power. How quickly all that can be destroyed by one simple mistake, someone's critical judgment on our efforts or even a natural disaster. The consequences of this erroneous teaching are anxiety and depression.

When challenged, my **self-esteem crumbles**, even with my best efforts at positive thinking. When I look at myself, I see garbage.

The Steps to Humility teach us how to change what we see in that mirror. Rather than seeing with our eyes and self-judgment, we now see how God sees and judges. The all-knowing, merciful, and loving God sees us, you, as precious creations that He has uniquely gifted with eternal, everlasting empowerment to continue His work of creation.

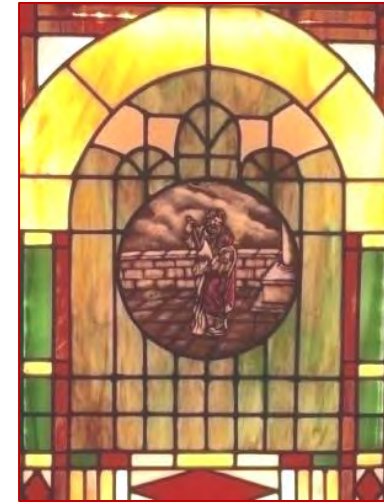
He will never change His mind or abandon you. You are in, with, and through Him every moment of every day. You are an heir to His Kingdom NOW and FOREVER. **Let us call that God's esteem.** We were created to want that Godly point of view.

However, the world wants to claim us with lies and deception. It misdirects us by seemingly pleasurable self-indulgence. The ultimate consequences are exhaustion, anxiety, and depression.

You are not alone on this journey. Your Cistercian family and leaders will guide and encourage you. St. Benedict encourages honest transparency and service to one another. Know that God has called you to holiness. He will grace and empower you. A new and exciting life is available to you and your loved ones



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

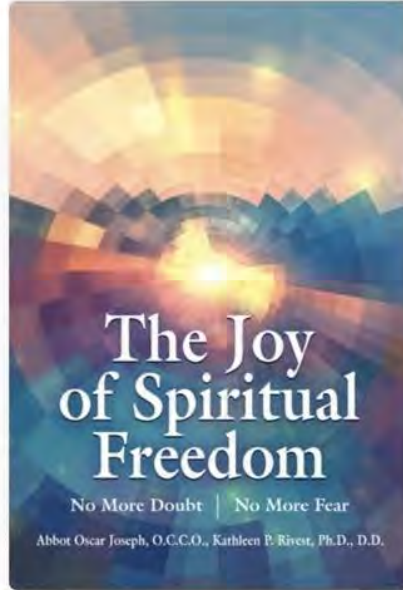
The Shop is reserved only for our members, oblates, their families, benefactors and friends of the Order. It is not available to the general population.



Cistercian Coffee Mug



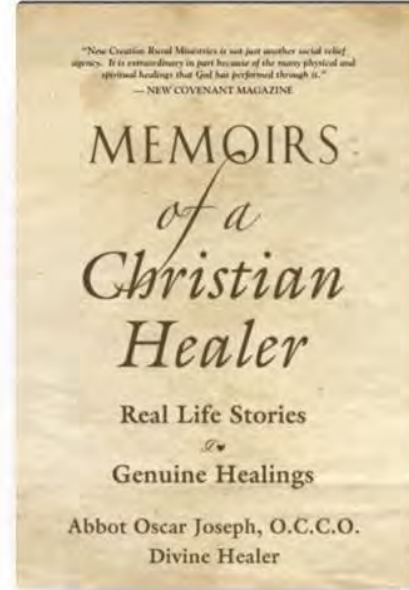
One option for each cup placed on both sides of cup



The Joy of Spiritual Freedom

No More Doubts | No More Fear

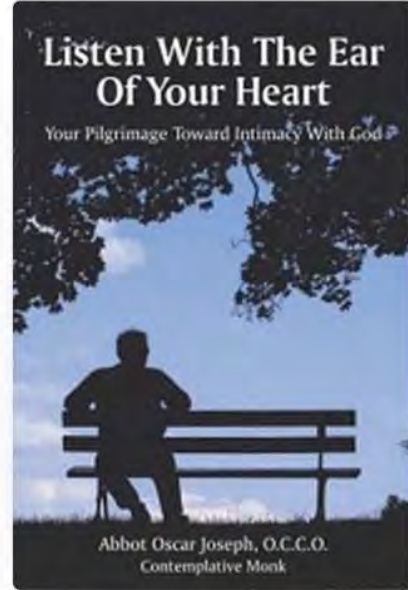
The Joy of Spiritual Freedom is the first of a trilogy that leads and inspires the reader to enter into a joy-filled relationship with a loving God. It is grounded in Biblical wisdom revealing how to remove debilitating doubt and fear. It draws from inspirational letters and case studies that illustrate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

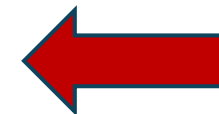
Read the information and listen to the videos. It all makes perfect sense. For more information go to our website. If you want to join, the application is on the website. Blessings.

- 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://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**

**For more information contact
Abbot@bellsouth.net**



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.