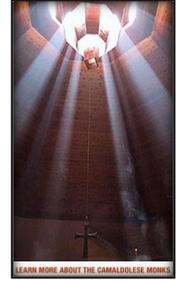




# Speak Lord. *Your servant is listening.*

Newsletter of the Benedictine Camaldolese Oblates of  
Australia and New Zealand  
June 2015



## Chaplain's Report Fr Michael Mifsud Oblate OSB Cam

In reading Camaldolese literature over the years, I have been particularly struck by Thomas Matus' statement somewhat along the line,

“The Camaldolese charism aims at bringing the individual person to true inner freedom”-a mature freedom of course ,that is not self- centred but Other centred in all its dimensions. I find Henri Le



Saux'[Abishiktananda] assertion,complimentary to the above ,Viz, “the aim of the spiritual life is to make one completely docile to the Spirit.”

I have always believed that these principles must be foremost in the development of our Camaldolese Oblate Family Community. These aims ,as we take on the process, help us grow to full human and therefore Christian and spiritual maturity in Christ. This applies to our personal but also communal life and Journey together.

Steadily pointing the boat in the right direction and steering the rudder firmly ,gently but persistently[as in our daily practice of Meditation AND Conversion], progressively over the years,



needs to be uppermost in our consciousness and commitment .I see it as the only way forward to real growth and not just infantile ,external conformity to an outside authority ,rather than one inwardly appropriated as one's own from a deep centre in harmony with personally discerned Divine Truth – resonant in one's innermost self and conscience .This is the Sacred place where as St Paul says 'My spirit and the Holy Spirit give united witness...”

As we grow in consciousness, we are now more aware than ever of such a plethora of events in our own inner lives and the World in which we live,and the rapidity of change and accelerated pace of life ,multiple forces and issues challenge us to deepen our



spiritual practice to be able to adequately integrate and harmonize our lives with The Other and all others, in the concentric circles of our Cosmic relationships. This is a tremendous task, [Mysterium, tremendum et fascinans], immense and mysterious as the Divine Mind and plan for the unfolding Universe. So the need is getting greater to deeply anchor and balance all the divergent and sometimes extreme sides of our personalities and the daily world of changing events which we collectively inhabit and affect and are together responsible for, in different ways and degrees.

Here is where only a deep, mature, spiritual and fully developed human response, with complete dedication of our minds, heart, soul and strength can give an inspired, hopeful and life giving contribution for the common good of all Creation. This simultaneously and naturally will benefit and promote our spiritual progress, because love alone will give us the only energy capable of transforming and transfiguring our acknowledged, weak frailty; physically, morally and spiritually. 'When I [know I] am weak, THEN I AM strong [In God]'

There are recurring moments in our life, at times very deep, obvious and instructive when our outer and inner circumstances enable us and point us in a particular path or process of Newness—coupled inevitably with an almost simultaneous or preceding experience of opportunity of dying or letting go of self to permit the Newness to emerge—This can be a difficult and turbulent moment of spiritual vertigo and dizzying inertia or paralysis. Only a courageous

act of faith, trust and ultimately Love can often propel us forward into the Unknown.

I have found the recent Inter Faith Pilgrimage to Ladakh one such moment. It has been instructive and beneficial in many ways in my inner spiritual journey, explicated by the outer circumstances which I had to initially face with uncertainty, trepidation, fear and trusting faith in a loving, mysterious Presence. My trust was not ill-founded or confounded. I found the whole experience at times both exhilarating and terrifying; flying low and landing between the Great Himalayan ranges, the dizzying, zig zagging, spiralling narrow tracks [roads] over incredible, snow covered

passes and heights such as [5300 meters] at Chang La near the Chinese-Tibetan-Indian Border Pangong Lake. And there were many other narrow mountain side tracks leading to incredibly marvellous monasteries and nunneries in green valleys amid horrendously rugged and dry, loose stoned amazing bastions of rock and snow in the air and sky above us.

In everything there, as in the inner journey, we needed acclimatization and constant patience to be able to take small, slow steps to begin with and losing breath and strength if we hurried with overconfidence or enthusiasm. Small is Good.

My impression of Ladakh [called Little Tibet], was that it expressed the quintessence of Tibet pre the Chinese Invasion. It has an almost unbroken 1000 yr plus, Mahayanan Tradition [except for Mongol-Viking-like incursions in 16th century] that is still a vibrant, living, thriving Buddhist society, grounded in everyday life. We were shown great hospitality by all Ladakhis, esp



the Nuns and monks we visited ,often during special ceremonies and festivals

It will take me a long time to process and integrate this Journey which let arise many deep down fears of death etc .And of course it involved the very seemingly ordinary ,but most important encounters and close knit daily sharing of life and difficulties associated with communal living and the foibles and phobias and idiosyncrasies of people in a special space of transition and travel ,inner and outer.I feel wonderfully blessed by the whole experience and also glad to be safely back home.

I feel this outer journey has been preparing me too so that I can enter more fully into the Experience of Inter Faith and Spirituality ,as my long standing Dream and working towards an Inter faith community ,looks very likely to take place in Warburton later this year. My Good friend for many years ,Lama Lobsang Tendar and his Sangha[community ] seem close to clinching the deal with the current owners of Green Gables Conference Centre so that our plans and hopes together over the last year and a half ,come to fruition .Next week final agreement hopefully will be reached, long before this article is read ,so here an other act of trust is called for in God's providance

Of course my Camaldolese Commitment remains paramount in all I endeavour to do and will be an expression of it and my commitment to Christ in deep Inter communion on many levels of relationship with Faith traditions ,people ,the Earth and environment. Please continue your prayerful support for which I am very grateful and be assured of my own.

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I am very pleased to share the encouraging way The Oblate Council is operating and working together for the service of our community .The Interaction is good and fruitful ,the exchanges valuable and the planing and work inspiring .With Sue as Facilitator ,discussion and on going progress is leading to careful and prayerful preparations and efforts for our community's development and future..

We are all very grateful to Paul Durkin ,loved and admired by all, for his past participation and service in the Council. Because of the heavy responsibilities of his parish and diocese ,he has retired from the council but not from his very dedicated commitment to the Oblate Vocation.

We are very happy to welcome Anthony Sharpe, our Newsletter Editor and whip onto the Council and are confident of his continuing service in his various capacities. Ruth Harrison continues in an advisory capacity in area environmental, ecological etc. Thanks to all.

We farewell with both Joy and sadness Trudy and Alwyn from our Australian shires as they retuyrn to Family and friends in India. We are very appreciative of their dedicated contribution to our community life and charism esp in Victoria. I am thankful to the service they both rendered, esp Trudy, assisting me as secretary and Membership updater for so long. We wish them well with prayerful support as they return to Mumbai, where they intend to plant the seed of Camaldolese Oblate Life. Thanks to you both and wishing you a fond farewell and hoping we may meet again in our travels there or here and keep in touch Love and heartfelt blessings.

### Fr Daniel Manger OSB Cam Knocking upon past doors

Looking for solutions to many of life's challenges are not all equal nor contain answers as complete objectivity. However, as Christians we are a community of memory, yet that is not based on our mere ability to recall past events that remain only two dimensional to our consciousness. Rather we are enabled in a religious way by the Holy Spirit, to be reminded of what Jesus taught by his life and words and deeds. This peculiar approach to human understanding through remembrance is one that takes effort to pray over our past experience and expect in hope that the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit will enable us to gain perspective on our progress or readiness to take a step down a path that both heals, reconciles and discloses to us the present with a fresh start on living and becoming more Gospel. Contemplative processes involve this actualization of remembrance and re-investment in a future that we render present with the hope God has given to each of us in Life. Knocking on doors of the past and hoping for an re-opening of the a view of our past also can be a time to re enter the unmanageable behaviors and actions of our life span. Praying over these is of vital help in perhaps not so much acquiring answers but rather a surrender to grace that we pick-up where we left off and continue in a direction of graced actions toward ourselves in mercy and hope. Knocking on the past doors shut by forgetting can be a trap of sorts, if we do not approach with respect for our selective listening that may not be so objective in assessing what needs be changed or let go of. It can be of some great help as the Desert Fathers and Mothers taught to examine our memories and thoughts with an experienced spiritual person and engage the 'wisdom' that veterans can often impart at the needed time. Another practice is to examine our conscience each day upon its conclusion, by building this into the matrix of our human habitat of relationship with God and others and ourselves and the environment of these relationships we can

develop a better sense of direction, next step, strategies and consolation and finally for hope that follows us in mercy. I will close this little reflection with a quote from Isaac of Nineveh in his Ascetic Treatises, #38: "It is not by fighting against the passions that one prevents them entering the heart. That is achieved rather by the gratification of conscience, by the knowledge with which the soul is filled, and by the desire for its own acts of contemplation." Knock! Knock, knock, knock!

### Michael Dougherty Oblate OSB Cam EASTERTIDE

"Don't cling to me."

Said Jesus to Mary

There is no need for that now

The yearning you experience

is born of hope

which is beyond possessing,

to let go is to allow

the expansiveness of being

flood into you

opening up the possibility

of being possessed by

the incomprehensible

Mystery of Love

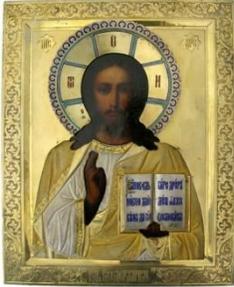
that is so close.

"Receive the Holy Spirit"

Says Jesus to us.

Michael Dougherty

2015



## Andrew Hede Oblate OSB Cam Finding 'Stillness' in Prayer: Wisdom from The Philokalia

The Philokalia is an anthology of writings on contemplative living by spiritual scholars in the Orthodox tradition between the 4th and 15th centuries. Initially written in Greek and revered within the Greek Orthodox Church, these texts were first published in Greek and then in Church Slavonic in the late 18th Century. The first English translation was published in five volumes in the late 20th Century (viz., Palmer, Sherrard & Ware, 1979). This translation is readily available today and is the source of the present selections (see endnote).

What is 'Stillness'?

A major theme in The Philokalia is that of hesychia (Greek ἡσυχία = stillness). Hesychia can be defined as: "a state of inner tranquillity or mental quietude and concentration which arises in conjunction with, and is deepened by, the practice of pure prayer and guarding of heart and intellect. Not simply silence but an attitude of listening to God and of openness towards Him." (The Philokalia, Glossary, p.1244).

Selections from The Philokalia

The following selections from The Philokalia (bold emphasis added) are between 600 and 1,600 years old. Yet somehow they sound contemporary in their meaning and tone, especially to those in the Western Church who are seeking to deepen their prayer life by embracing the practices of Christian Meditation and Centering Prayer.

Evagrius the Solitary (4th Century AD) 'On Prayer'

\* "Try to make your intellect deaf and dumb during prayer; you will then be able to pray." (The Philokalia, [V1] 58, p.31).

\* "Undistracted prayer is the greatest intellection of the intellect." (The Philokalia, [V1] 60, p.32).

\* "If you seek prayer attentively you will find it; for nothing is more essential for prayer than attentiveness." (The Philokalia, [V1] 71, p.41).

St Isaiah the Solitary (4-5th Century AD) 'On Guarding the Intellect'

\* "Keeping his attention fixed within himself, he [a meditator] should commune with God in stillness guarding his thoughts from distraction and his intellect from curiosity." (The Philokalia, [V1] 17, p.10).

St Mark the Ascetic (5th Century AD) 'On the Spiritual Law'

\* "When you find that some thought is disturbing you deeply within yourself and is breaking the stillness of your intellect with passion, you may be sure that it was your intellect which, taking the initiative, first activated this thought and placed it in your heart... No cloud is formed without a breath of wind; and no passion is born without a thought." (The Philokalia, [V1] 122, p.81).

St Hesychios the Priest (5th Century AD) 'On Watchfulness and Holiness'

\* "Watchfulness is a way embracing every virtue, every commandment. It is the heart's stillness and, when free from mental images, it is the guarding of the intellect." (The Philokalia, [V1] 163, p.111).

\* "Attentiveness is the heart's stillness, unbroken by any thought. In this stillness the heart breathes and invokes, endlessly and without ceasing, only Jesus Christ who is the Son of God and Himself God." (The Philokalia, [V1] 163, p.111).

\* "Much water makes up the sea. But extreme watchfulness and the Prayer of Jesus Christ, undistracted by thoughts, are the necessary basis for inner vigilance and unfathomable stillness of soul, for

the deeps of secret and singular contemplation, for the humility who knows and assesses, for rectitude and love. This watchfulness and this Prayer must be intense, concentrated and unremitting.” (The Philokalia, [V1] 164, p.112).

\* “These gifts are the guarding of the intellect by the invocation of Jesus Christ, continuous insights into the heart’s depths, stillness of mind unbroken even by thoughts which appear to be good, and the capacity to be empty of all thought.” (The Philokalia, [V1] 180, p.125).

\* “The name of Jesus should be repeated over and over in the heart as flashes of lightning are repeated over and over in the sky before rain. Those who have experience of the intellect and of inner warfare know this very well. We should wage this spiritual warfare with a precise sequence: first, with attentiveness; then when we perceive the hostile thought attacking, we should strike it in the heart, cursing it as we do so; thirdly, we should direct our prayer against it, concentrating the heart through the invocation of Jesus Christ, so that the demonic fantasy may be dispersed at once, the intellect no longer pursuing it like a child deceived by some conjurer.” (The Philokalia, [V1] 180, pp.125-6).

Nikiphoros the Monk (13th Century) ‘On Watchfulness and the Guarding of the Heart’ “Moreover, when your intellect is firmly established in your heart, it should not remain there silent and idle; it should constantly repeat and meditate on the prayer ‘Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me’, and should never stop doing this. For this prayer protects the intellect from distraction, renders it impregnable to diabolic attacks, and every day increases its love and desire for God.” (The Philokalia, [V4] 206, pp.1019-20). St Simon of Sinai (1265-1346) ‘On Stillness: The Beginning of Watchfulness’ “St John Klimakos says ‘Let mindfulness of Jesus be united to your breathing, and then you will



know the blessings of stillness’.” (The Philokalia, [V4] 266, p.1064).

St Gregory Palamas (1296-1359) ‘The Declaration of the Holy Mountain in Defense of Those Who Devoutly Practice a Life of Stillness’ “Through the practice of a life of stillness they devote their attention undistractedly to themselves and to God, and by transcending themselves through sincere prayer and by establishing themselves in God through their mystical and supra-intellectual union with Him they have been initiated into what surpasses the intellect.” (The Philokalia, [V4] 419, pp.1234-5). Current methods of contemplative prayer in the Western Church, such as Christian Meditation and Centering Prayer, are acknowledged to be linked to the writings of the Desert Sages. For example, John Main specifically cites the Conferences of John Cassian (360-435 AD) as the key source for the use in Christian Meditation of a repeated word or mantra during meditative prayer. In the 1970s, Benedictine monk John Main recommended his revived meditation method by pointing out that St Benedict (480-543 AD) listed the Conferences as required reading in his since widely adopted monastic Rule (see Chs 42 & 72). Interestingly, there is little emphasis on hesychia in Christian Meditation writings despite the long tradition dating from contemporaries of John Cassian, as evidenced in the above selections from The Philokalia. These quotations reveal that the well-established principles of hesychia, maintained through the ages within the Orthodox tradition, are fully compatible with those of modern Western contemplative practice. Endnote: Selections sourced from: Palmer, G.E.H., Sherrard, P., & Ware, A.K. (Editors and Translators) 1979, The Philokalia, Faber & Faber, London. Anthology of Orthodox Christian writings (1246 pages) free online at: [https://archive.org/stream/Philokalia-TheCompleteText/Philokalia-Complete-Text\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/Philokalia-TheCompleteText/Philokalia-Complete-Text_djvu.txt) {Accessed: 17 May 2015}.



### A pilgrimage of encounter with the East Michael Bird Oblate OSB Cam

I have always been aware of the orthodox churches which seem to inhabit the Bellpark and Bellpost Hill areas which are adjacent to each other geographically. The North Geelong suburb area where I live and the above mentioned areas have a large population of Eastern Europeans who settled in these parts mainly during the 1950's and 60's. They



come from countries such as Croatia, Serbia, Russia, Ukraine, Slavonika, Greece etc. Special masses are still celebrated each week in the Catholic Holy Family Church Bellpark for the Croation and the Slavic communities. They have special celebrations connected with St Anthony of Padua each year.

Sometimes on a Thursday morning I have a chance to attend 9.15am mass at the Holy Family Catholic



Church in Bellpark. I have a particular walking route which takes me about 20 minutes to walk to the church and I cut back via another route which sort of takes me in a clockwise circular route back to home.

Recently after attending the Thursday morning mass I decided to divert from my normal route and explore the Russian Orthodox Church which is just up a side street from my normal route. It is a structure which



stands out with its imposing golden globular towers and green tiled roof. I found out that it was dedicated to the, 'Mother of God – The Joy of all Sorrows'.

I continued around the corner expecting to join up onto my normal route along Linear Park when I noticed another domed church not far away. It turned out to be a Catholic Ukrainian Church which was similar in structure to the Russian Orthodox but larger





and the domes where of a silver colour. There was a special separate circular structure near the entrance dedicated in 1988 which celebrated one thousand years of Christianity in Ukraine. The church had a sign up saying everyone was welcome. The church was dedicated to the, 'Protection of the Mother of God'. I had learned previously that the Ukrainian Catholic Church had a great devotion to the Mother of God which helped to sustain them through the dark years



of Communism under Joseph Stalin.

Just opposite a bit further up the same road was a similar but much smaller, 'Orthodox Ukrainian Church', which was dedicated to the, 'Nativity of the Mother of God'. It was interesting that the Catholic Eastern Rite and Orthodox existed side by side probably like they did in Ukraine



I continued on my journey looking for a way back onto the right path when I noticed another church in the distance built of white bricks and reasonably large. It was on the other side of the highway up a side street. As I approached the church I could see that there was



some activity going on outside the buildings. The church was Greek Orthodox dedicated to the, 'Dormitian of the Mother of God'. There seemed to be something going on inside. I thought to myself, "I am going inside to have a look". I opened the door and was stuck immediately by the beautiful icons which were literally splashed around all the interior walls with some individual icons hanging from interior columns. The Icons were mainly displaying the life of Christ. I recognized Icons St Michael and the Mother of God. The beautiful alter was exposed between two open doors in the sanctuary area. These doors which had full length icons, probably of saints, lined the sanctuary on both sides. It seemed that a service had just finished and the congregation where dispersing. A beautiful elderly gentleman approached me and asked if I wanted some help. In his broken English he wanted to know if I wanted to speak to the Priest but we finished up having a lively chat until he was paged by his wife waiting in the car and had to leave quickly. It was interesting that he talked about Constantinople and seemed to imply that the rift between the East and West Christian Churches started about the time the Roman Empire became Christianized. Before he left he gave me a rectangular piece of bread in a gesture of friendship. It must have been a custom for the congregation to take home a piece of bread cut

from a larger loaf. I continued to enjoy the Icons for a while before continuing my pilgrimage.

Not far up the road on the same side was the Serbian Orthodox Church called St Nicolas. Like the other churches it had its own distinct style but also had a school attached as well as the usual presbytery etc. It was now time to head home.

I was able to attend mass the following Thursday again at 9.15 at the Holy Family Catholic Church in Geelong. It was the Thursday after the Roman Catholic Church had celebrated the Ascension of Jesus Christ on the previous Sunday. I started to head home on my usual route when I thought that I would visit the Orthodox Churches again as I had on the previous Sunday.

As I approached the Russian Orthodox Church I thought I could hear some chanting going on inside. The doors were closed so I didn't venture inside. There were also several cars parked in the small car park opposite the presbytery community rooms.

I continued onto the Catholic Ukrainian Church around the corner and there was definitely something going on inside, so I boldly entered. I was met with a stunning display of Icons plastered all around the interior displaying the life of Christ and the saints. It seemed they were in the middle of a service so I quietly sat down at the back and tried to appreciate what was happening. The priest was still in the process of consecrating the bread and the wine on the small golden altar up in the elaborate sanctuary and all could be clearly seen. The priest was facing away from the congregation and obviously celebrating in the Ukrainian language. There was a lot of chanting. I couldn't help myself from looking around the interior and appreciating the beautiful icons which covered every part of the walls. It was interesting working out what the Icons were portraying and appreciating the unique style used. It



came time for reception of the Body and Blood of Christ and the priest came out of the sanctuary and dispensed the species via a little spoon. I didn't go up because I had already received the Eucharist at the Holy Family and also didn't want to intrude. It was a Catholic Church and I was entitled to receive the Eucharist if I so desired. The service continued with the Priest and Deacon Kneeling before the beautiful Gold Altar and chanting some sort of litany. The congregation joined in the chanting, especially the women up the front. The chanting was beautiful but I wasn't able to understand any of the words. After a while I decided to go up to two gentlemen who seemed to be loitering up the back area and were not engaged in the chanting. I looked across to them at one stage and they raised their eyebrows indicating here go the women doing their chanting again. I asked

them what special celebration the congregation were celebrating and they could barely speak English. I found out that they were celebrating the Ascension. It all fell into place. The Eastern Orthodox churches celebrated Easter a Week after the Western Churches earlier in the year and were now celebrating the Ascension a week later as well. Even the Ukrainian Catholic Church was celebrating the Easter ceremonies according to the Orthodox Calendar. The two men were very welcoming and were very happy to hear that I was a Catholic.

It seemed to be a lengthy litany I thought I had experienced enough chanting in a language I didn't understand. I headed out of the church and continued down the street past the, 'Ukrainian Orthodox Church', where there was no action and then onto the, 'Greek Orthodox Church', where they had just finished celebrating the Ascension of Jesus Christ. I poked my head into the door and the janitor was sweeping the entrance alcove. They looked done and dusted so I continued my pilgrimage.

As I passed the Serbian Orthodox Church I wondered if there was anything happening. I headed around to the back entrance and ventured through the gate and to my surprise the door of the church opened. They were in the middle of celebrating the Ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven. This set up was completely different. There was no chairs but an open standing area where several members of the church were standing on either side which included some Serbian looking men on one side and a few women on the other. There was a young mother who was having trouble containing her child's enthusiasm. At one stage the child bolted up to the box in the alcove containing a box with tapers and grabbed some. The mother did her best to gather the child but gave him the concession of grabbing a handful of tapers. The child must have thought that the tapers were the most exciting thing happening around this place. The priest could be heard chanting behind a closed partition which had the usual icons on its many doors. Incense could be seen mushrooming from around the partition and its scent hung heavily in the air. The church was a lot plainer than the other two churches where I had previously seen their interior. There were a few icons but not the elaborate decoration all over the walls. Maybe the reason for the less number of icons was because it was a smaller church or it was their custom. They were obviously in the middle of the service so I discretely headed out and onwards along my pilgrimage.



I found my normal route back along linear park and started to head home. I started wondering about the Russian Orthodox Church and if there was a possibility of seeing the interior. I was becoming more confident in gate crashing sacred liturgies and was keen to see if the church was still open. The weather looked a bit threatening but I still decided to head off

my course and backtracked towards the Russian Orthodox Church called the, 'Mother of God - The Joy of all Sorrows'. As I approached the church I could see a few cars leaving the area. When I arrived at the church I could see the church was open and I headed straight inside. I was immediately struck by the beautiful icons literally spread all over the walls and roof of the inside of the church. It was an open area with no seating and the Sacred Alter was hidden behind the partitioning doors which had the usual icons of either Apostles or Saints painted onto their exterior. The Russian Orthodox Priest, who was a tall, lean, bearded man, was standing there in the middle of the open area and I asked him if I could have a look around the inside of the church. He finished up giving me a great tour of the different icons. He expressed

that they were like the work of Michelangelo the great artist of the Sistine Chapel. The icons had been completed by a special Russian artist in a deeply spiritual work. We also had an interesting conversation about the Orthodox Church and other related topics.

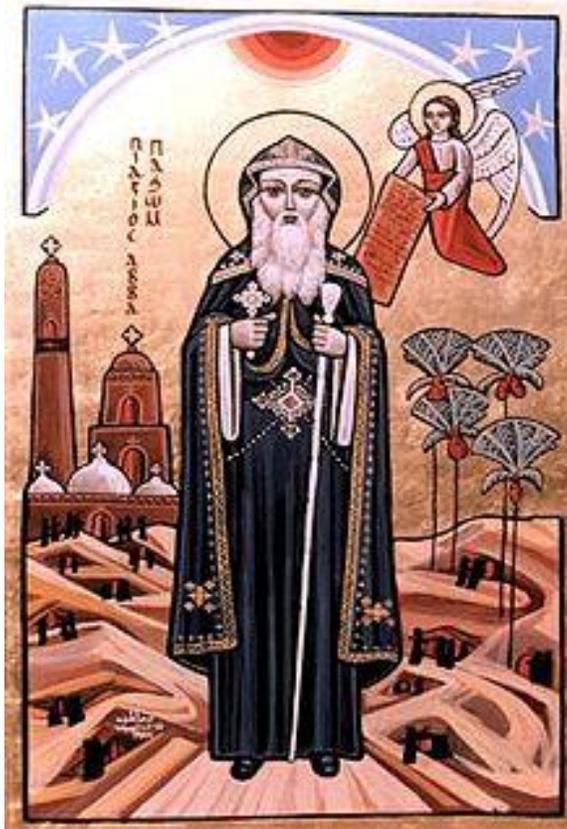
Interestingly there were two Icons of Saint Seraphim of Savov who rated very highly. Saint Seraphim's Icon was next to Saint Serge who is credited with founding the Russian Orthodox Monasteries throughout Russia.

The conversation with the Russian Orthodox Priest covered many topics. He explained the Icon of Mary of Magdala holding a red egg. The Orthodox have a legend that Mary of Magdala was at one point in Rome where she confronted the Roman Emperor and the egg she was holding turned red indicating the death and resurrection of Christ. This was supposed to be the origin of the Easter Egg.

The conversation with the Russian Priest covered other topics about the intricacies of our Christian

History. The Priest indicated that in his opinion the split between Eastern and Western Christianity could be traced to, 'Pope Saint Gregory the Great', introducing the law of Celibacy amongst the general clergy. He thought that celibacy was for Monks and Nuns in Monasteries and the general clergy should be allowed to marry. He blamed the current scandals in the Catholic Church on the law of Celibacy. The priests in his church could be defrocked immediately. The slaughter of the Orthodox Church members in Constantinople in 1202AD by the Western Christian Crusaders didn't help relations between Eastern and Western Christianity and drove the final blow for the schism between Eastern and Western Christianity. I had to agree with him on that point.

The Russian Priest also talked about the, 'Philioque'. The Eastern Orthodox Christian Church believes in the original wording of the Nicene Creed which says that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father. He quoted John Ch 15 which indicates that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father. I incorrectly believed that the Orthodox faith taught the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father through the Son. The Orthodox Church believe the Western Christian Church changed the Nicene Creed after the fact and taught that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father and the Son. John Ch 16 does have Jesus saying he has to return to the Father so he can send the Holy Spirit. If the Father and the Son are one surely they participate in each other's actions.



The Russian Orthodox Priest also talked about how they take fasting seriously during the Lent and Advent seasons only eating vegetables and bread. I had seen an article on the news when they were interviewing a Greek Orthodox man who was pleased that Easter had arrived for he was now able to eat more than Vegetables and bread.

Another point the Russian Priest made was that they have always given the Eucharist to the members of the Orthodox Church under both species of bread and

Wine, something the Western Church stopped doing in its early history. The Russian Priest also thought that the Western Church had stolen the idea of the Icons of the Our Lady of Perpetual Help and the Black Madonna. Both these Icons are found inside St Mary's Basilica in Geelong.

The Russian Priest recommended that I read some Orthodox classics such as the standard book on Orthodoxy by Timothy Ware, 'The Orthodox Church: An Introduction to Eastern Christianity'. This book provides a good introduction to the Orthodox thought and

teaching. Another author he recommended was Seraphim Rose who was a convert to the Orthodox Faith and wrote many books about his experience.

This finished my pilgrimage and I headed on my way back home.

I have since discovered that there is a Greek Orthodox Monastery in Lovely Banks, Geelong situated on a hill which can be seen clearly from the location of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Catholic Ukrainian

Church. It has English Services every month on Saturday Mornings at 9.30. I plan to attend some of these services in future.

George A. Maloney was a Catholic Priest SJ ordained in the Russian Byzantine Rite. I don't know how he did this but this is on his biographical detail. He obtained a doctorate in Eastern Christian Spirituality and lectured on this topic in Universities and opened centres for the study and augmenting of these studies. He has written over sixty books on spirituality related to the Eastern Orthodox Spirituality and its history. These books are worth exploring for their rich teaching on prayer and the rich veins of Eastern Spirituality which they expose. He has written introductions for the series called, 'Classics of Western Spirituality', on works by Eastern Theologians such Symeon the New Theologian, Nil Sorsky – the Complete Works and Pseudo Marcarius: the Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter. George Maloney died in 2005 aged 82 years.

George Maloney's book named, 'Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh – An Introduction to Eastern Christian Spirituality', published 1997 is a good a summary of the deep riches the Eastern Spirituality has to offer. The Eastern Spirituality and theology went further in promoting the roots of Christology originally expressed by Saint Paul the Apostle and John the Evangelist. It found its expression through St Basil, St Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzen and was taken up by Pseudo Dionysius. They talk about the unknowable essence of God but the ability for us to experience God through His uncreated energies.

George Maloney's most highly rated book is considered to be, 'Prayer of the Heart – The Contemplative Tradition of the Christian East'. It was originally published in 1981 but has been republished and is easily obtainable. Some other books he has written have great sounding titles, such as: 'God's Exploding Love', 'Why Not Become Totally Fire', 'The Silence of Surrendering Love', 'Invaded by God', 'Pilgrimage of the Heart', 'The Spirit Broods over the

World', 'Entering into the Heart of Jesus', 'The Breath of the Mystic', 'Listen, Prophets', 'God's Incredible Mercy', 'Bright Darkness', 'Abiding in the Indwelling Trinity' and 'Inward Stillness'. These titles reflect the rich mystical theology which the Eastern Christian Spirituality has to offer.

The Eastern Fathers of the Church have a rich spirituality to contribute. Mary the Mother of God (Theotokos) has a central role in understanding Eastern Spirituality as can be seen in the dedications of the different Orthodox and Eastern Christian Churches which I encountered on my pilgrimage around Bellpark Geelong.

### **Michael Dougherty Oblate OSB Cam John Main's rediscovery of Cassian**

One of John Cassian's meaningful phrases is experientia magistra (experience is the teacher). This expresses a profound Christian truth: that Christ is the teaching and the teacher and, if we can faithfully meet the time-tested spiritual conditions - silence, stillness and simplicity - we will be led into experiential understanding of this unity. In your own experience is a phrase not only often found in St Paul but also John Main, both teachers. The discipline taught is faith in practice. Experience for John Main, John Cassian, St Paul always needs to be grounded in faith. However faith means more than belief or cognitive knowledge. It is not about conforming to opinion, but conforming to reality - which is an inclusive, participatory way of knowing and seeing. Faith is therefore itself a kind of experience: In Hebrews 11.1 Faith gives substance to our hopes and convinces us of realities we do not see. By itself, experience could lead one astray into spiritual subjectivism, but experience attended to in faith and active in love forms us as citizens of the Kingdom in true discipleship.

John Main (1926 - 1982) was profoundly influenced by John Cassian's teachings, particularly on prayer. This was expressed in the last few years of his life in an outpouring of teaching on Christian Meditation -

which led to the creation of community and inter-faith dialogue.

It is fruitful, I think, to reflect upon how John Main in his life rediscovered and connected with John Cassian and made his teachings pertinent to the modern person of today, even outside monastery walls. Though there have been many monastic communities today who have sought and benefited from John Main's teaching on prayer and meditation.

One such community were the monks of Gethsemane Monastery, where Thomas Merton was a monk and eventually a hermit. It was whilst staying in Merton's hermitage that John Main gave three conferences on prayer. He had been invited to give these to the community, titled Prayer in the tradition of John Cassian, in November 1976. The transcripts of these talks became his first published teaching on meditation: Christian Meditation: The Gethsemane Talks. In these talks, especially the first one he openly shares his faith journey into what he termed Christian Meditation.

Laurence Freeman, who continued the work of teaching and creating community started by John Main, wrote the introduction to the above publication. He reminds us of the need for authenticity for us to live and engage in the world today. The teaching of John Main: is that, we are today facing an unavoidable challenge in the proclamation of the Gospel - a challenge to the real basis of our own faith in the gospel and to the real authority with which we proclaim it. The roots of our faith and so of our authority must be personal. Our contemporaries will not believe what we preach if it lacks the authenticity of personal authority and experience. And the challenge to Christian communities to rediscover their own power transmitted in the gift of the Spirit, and to re-experience a rediscovery of prayer.

The point about experience, faith and rediscovery is pertinent to John Main's inner journey. In 1954 after

graduating from Trinity College, Dublin with a Phd in Law he applied to join the British Colonial Service: This decision eventually led him to be sent the following year to Malaya as a diplomat. This time in the East was momentous and pivotal in his spiritual journey.

One day, Douglas Main ( that was his name then) was sent by the Governor to deliver a good-will message to the Swami Satyananda. Who was he? A Hindu monk and the principal of a school for boys and also one for girls. He built an orphanage and started the Pure Life Society, a community devoted to bring harmony between people of different religions and backgrounds. He himself was orphaned at the age of ten and spent a time being educated in a Catholic institution and considered at some point converting to Catholicism. A decision he did not take. He was a teacher of meditation. The Swami's expressed life's goal was to restore the consciousness of the Kingdom of God among his fellow men.

So let us now follow what transpired on this first visit of John Main with Swami Satyananda. In his own words from the first Conference to these Cistercian Monks of Gethsemane in 1976 he retells the event:

When I first met him on some official business or other I was deeply impressed by his peacefulness and calm wisdom. I was pleased to see that he seemed to be willing to talk on a personal level once our business was concluded and fell into conversation. He then asked me if I was a religious man. I told him I was a Catholic. He then asked me if I meditated. I told him I tried to and at his bidding, described briefly what we have come to know as the Ignation method of meditation. He was silent for a short time and then gently remarked that his own tradition of meditation was quite different. For the Swami, the aim of meditation was the coming to awareness of the Spirit of the universe who dwells in our hearts and he recited these verses from the Upanishads: He contains all things, all works and desires and all perfumes and tastes. And He enfolds the whole

universe and in silence, is loving to all. This is the Spirit that is in my heart. This is Brahman.

The swami read this passage with such devotion and such meaning that I asked him if he would accept me as a pupil to teach me how to meditate in his way.

Douglas was thirty at the time. It was 1955. This was an amazing openness, an openness to truth that he intuited outside his own tradition.

He continues: The swami then replied: Meditation is very simple, all you have to do is meditate. If you would like to learn I will try to teach you. What I suggest is this: that you come out and meditate with me once a week. Before we meditate I will tell you a few things, but the important thing is that we meditate together.

Then John Main continues: I began to visit the holy man regularly and this is what he told me on my first visit. He said: To meditate you must become silent. You must be still. And you must concentrate. In our tradition we know one way in which you can arrive at that stillness, that concentration. We use a word that we call a mantra. To meditate, what you must do is choose this word and repeat it, faithfully, lovingly and continually. That is all there is to meditation. I really have nothing else to tell. And now we will meditate.

Once a week, for 18 months Douglas came back to meditate. The swami insisted that he had to meditate twice a day, morning and evening. At one time the swami explained in more detail how to meditate:

And during the time of meditation there must be in your mind, no thoughts, no words, no imaginations. The sole sound will be the sound of your mantra, your word. The mantra is like a harmonic. And as we sound this harmonic within ourselves we begin to build up a resonance. That resonance then leads us forward to our own wholeness. We begin to experience the deep unity we all possess in our being. And then the harmonic begins to build up a resonance between you

and all creatures and all creation and a unity between you and your creator.

Douglas would often ask the swami how long would all this take to achieve enlightenment. But the swami would either ignore these crass queries or reply : Say your mantra. This reply really summed up his teaching. In all these eighteen months this was the essential core of everything the swami had to say to Douglas : Say your mantra.

Douglas returned to Europe and took up a junior professorship to teach law at Trinity College, Dublin. This was in 1956. For the next four years he continued his twice daily meditation.

He tells the monks at Gethsemane: for me there was all the joy and excitement of the pilgrimage of my morning and evening meditation. All the time there was a growing attraction to meditation and the morning and evening times became the real axis on which my day was built.

During this time he developed an intense relationship which led to an engagement to marriage, but this ended, Diana and he decided that they were not meant to marry each other; Though they would remain very important life long friends. Nevertheless it must have been a trauma at the time and this was soon followed by another trauma. His eldest sister's son, 11year old David developed an inoperable brain tumor. His sister was a widow and Douglas had become a second father to all his sister's children. David and the other children worshiped him. He sat beside the bed of his dying nephew for weeks.

This is what he said to the monks: The death of this child had an enormous effect on me and brought me face to face with the questions of life and death and the whole purpose of existence. As I reviewed my life at this time I was forcibly struck by the fact that the most important thing in my entire existence was my daily meditation. I decided, therefore to structure my life on my meditation and sought to do so by becoming a monk.

He had been frequently visiting monasteries in his spiritual quest and eventually entered Ealing Monastery just outside of London. He was 33 by then.

Douglas expected to continue and intensify his meditation with a mantra that he had learned in Malaya. When he mentioned that approach to the novice master, he was told that this was not the Benedictine way. He was invited to use the prayer of acts (adoration, contrition, thanksgiving, and supplication). Which by the way, is featured in Conference 9 of John Cassian. Using a form of prayer that was largely words was very difficult for Douglas, but still he did it in a spirit of obedience.

Main continues: I waited and postponed any serious confrontation with the fact that this new form of prayer was becoming more and more unsatisfactory. In retrospect I regard this period in my life as one of great grace. I learned to become detached from the practice that was most sacred to me and on which I was seeking to build my life. Instead I learned to build my life on God himself. The next few years were bleak years in terms of spiritual development. I think too that somewhere deep inside of me there was a faith that God would not leave me forever wandering in the wilderness and would call me back on to the path. What was important was that I should come back on God's terms and not my own.

And that time came . About 12-13 years later. He was headmaster of St Anselm's Abbey School in Washington DC. Within a few years he pulled the school out of the doldrums. In the midst of this busyness, a young man came to the monastery asking to be taught something about Christian mysticism. He had spent some time with a Hindu teacher but now was looking for the Christian stand point. So John Main (John is the name he took as a monk) gave him a rather difficult-to-read book HOLY WISDOM by a 17th Cent monk, Augustine Baker: a history of the contemplative tradition. In his own words John Main says:

To my amazement, he reacted with real and immediate enthusiasm, to such a degree that I felt I had to read it again myself. We began to read it together and very soon afterwards we also began to meditate together.

In Baker I rediscovered a sense of wonder of the monastic vocation which years of mere busyness had dulled, together with a glimmering understanding of prayer in its simplicity and its present reality. He writes with both the confidence and appeal of a man who has recognised the wrong turnings that have somehow brought him back to the right path. He writes with authority.

Baker's frequent reminder of the emphatic insistence St Benedict lays upon Cassian's Conferences sent me to them seriously for the first time. It was with very wonderful astonishment that I read, in his Tenth Conference, of the practice of using a single short phrase to achieve the stillness necessary for prayer.

In reading these words in Cassian and chapter 10 of the same Conference on the method of continual prayer, I was arrived home once more and returned to the practise of the mantra.

After five years as principal in Washington DC Main returned to his monastery in London to start a lay community based on meditation. He took this unusual step because of a deepening sense of how hard it was for monastic schools to provide an enduring spiritual preparation for life. They sent out well educated young people who were better equipped than most for the competitive world of work. But the question John Main asked was: Would they know life in the dimension of Spirit, as a mystery rooted in the joy of being? Or would their contact with life be restricted to the sense of a struggle for success to which the fading memory of their monastic schooling would become increasingly irrelevant?

Underlying these questions John Main was thinking of the spiritual and social role played by Buddhist monasticism in many countries in Asia. During his

years in the East, he had seen how the young people often spent a period of spiritual training in a monastery before starting off in the world. John Main was thinking of the young right at the beginning of his experiment - the focus of hope in any society. Particularly training in contemplative prayer.

So for the next six to seven years John Main put his energies, experience and knowledge to work in establishing such communities in London first of all, then in Montreal, Canada until his death in December of 1982. It was a deeply fruitful time of teaching, spiritual practice and creating community.

Father Bede Griffiths in a letter wrote: in my experience John Main is the most important spiritual guide in the Church today. The person who received this letter from Bede queried him as to what he meant by this. What Bede meant was the uniqueness of the way John Main met certain critical needs of modern people in their search for a deeper experience of God. Particularly was John Main's recovery of the tradition of the mantra within Christianity, in the teachings of the Desert Fathers and John Cassian in particular. This enabled the modern Christian to follow a method of contemplation with which he or she could feel theologically and culturally comfortable. And Bede states that this recovery of a way of non-discursive meditation filled a tragic gap of several centuries in Western Christian spiritual life.

Another Benedictine scholar, Adelbert De Vogue, has said in his article: From John Cassian to John Main (Monastic Studies number 15) that just as Cassian bridges Eastern and Western Christianity, so John Main is a bridge today between the Christian and non-Christian world.

Let the last words of this presentation come from John Main himself. These words are part of a short forward to his Moment of Christ. He wrote this in the last few weeks before he died. He was terminally ill at

the time. The words have an authority and clarity for which his life seemed the preparation.

It is our conviction that it is the most important task for any fully human life that we should become as open as possible to this stream of love. We have to allow this prayer to become our prayer, we have to enter into the experience of being swept out of ourselves - beyond ourselves into this wonderful prayer of Jesus - this great cosmic river of love.

In order for us to do this we must learn a way that is a way of silence, of stillness, and this by a discipline that is most demanding. It is as though we have to create a space within ourselves that will allow this higher consciousness - the consciousness of the prayer of Jesus - to envelop us in this powerful mystery.

We have got used to thinking of prayer in terms of "my prayer" or "my praise" of God, and it requires a complete rethinking of our attitude to prayer if we are going to come to see it as a way through Jesus, with Jesus, and in Jesus.

The first requirement is that we begin to understand that we must pass beyond egoism, so that "my" prayer just doesn't become even a possibility. We are summoned to see with the eyes of Christ and to love with the heart of Christ, and to respond to this summons we must pass beyond egoism. In practical terms this means learning to be so still and silent that we cease thinking about ourselves. This is of critical importance - we must be open to the Father through Jesus, and when we are at prayer we must become like the eye that can see but that cannot see itself. The way we set out on this pilgrimage of "other-centredness" is to recite a short phrase, a word that is commonly called today a mantra. The mantra is simply a means of turning our attention beyond ourselves - a way of unhooking us from our own thoughts and concerns.

Reciting the mantra brings us to stillness and to peace. We recite it for as long as we need to before

we are caught up into the one prayer of Jesus. The general rule is that we must first learn to say it for the entire period of our meditation each morning and each evening and then to allow it to do its work of calming over a period of years.

### Dusk Will Day Oblate OSB Cam

At dusk, down by the river the mood is muted and expectant. Night is on its way.

Not far from the tall red-brick pillars of the old highway bridge, an haphazard clump of branches protrudes from the centre of the stream, collecting detritus that floats down from the outer suburbs. A favourite roosting place for birds.

As I pass by this evening a long, lean cormorant has perched on the highest branch; slick black wings, cream chest and belly lunging down from her snake like neck to her firmly planted feet. The neck itself extends and twirls sinuously into the air, the long strong fisher-bird's beak sniffing the wind: is it time to settle for the night or is there one last adventure to be had above or below?

I continue walking in the gathering silence, the thickening twilight. I haven't a torch so mustn't venture too much further.

Later, finding my way back down the track towards home, I look out for the cormorant as I approach her roost. Yes, there she is atop her pile, quite still, her neck curled, fierce beak tucked in under the stately ebony wing, the night wrapping about her.

Further along the track, in the shallow water by the shadowy bank, ducks squat low; fluffy balls dotted here and there on protruding logs or rocks, heads tucked snugly along their sides, quiet darkness claiming them. Here on the river the expectant mood has dissipated; night has come.

I walk home through the trees, entranced by the blanket of stillness.

Sitting in my room to meditate, I close my eyes. As I settle, sepia after-images of the river walk float before my mind's eye: the resting cormorant on her stark branch, dim rounded shapes of three ducks on a rock in the shallows, a deep veil of shadow hanging over the water under wattle boughs.

It seems I am perched with those feathered creatures in the enfolding darkness, tucking my head under the wing of the great mystery which holds us all through each night. And through each day.

### Encountering the Abbess at St Mary's Abbey, West Malling, Kent UK, Glen Wolter Oblate OSB Cam



It was revealed in a monastic magazine, to which I subscribed, that the Abbess of St Mary's Abbey was a Zen practitioner. As I had just commenced Zen practice training I felt I had to meet such a person.



Sue and I wrote to the guest sister to stay for two days in 2003. When we arrived I asked the guest sister if we could meet Sr Mary John and was informed that she would speak to the Abbess and would let us know.

Within a short time we were given the following instructions: be in the Chapel at 5.30am tomorrow morning. We were faithfully there at 5.30am, sitting in the visitors' section. All around us the grey stones stared at us in silence and the early morning sunrays were dissolving the greyness of the dawn.



Suddenly a figure of a nun appeared and silently entered the precinct of the altar. She made a profound gassho (bowed), then knelt on the bare pavement stone in the thunderbolt position and meditated for almost an hour. Sue and I joined her.

At the close of the hour she rose, turned, made another deep gassho and silently moved to the chapel exit used by the nuns and disappeared.

It was time for breakfast. There were no words, all had been communicated.



## Updates and sundry thoughts Anthony Sharpe Oblate OSB Cam

Fellow oblates: a reminder that monies paid towards funding retreats and for visiting guests are to be paid into the following account: Camaldolese Oblates of Australasia BSB:064424 (CBA), A/C: 10611339.

Fr Cyprian Consiglio OSB Cam will be giving our retreat in 2016. Dates are yet to be confirmed. Contributions towards his airfares and accommodations costs can be made at any time.

Dates for oblate retreat 2015: Friday 18 September – Sunday 20 September 2015.

Venue: Palotti College, Millgrove, Vic

Opportunity to arrive Thursday and stay Sunday night. Costs to be advised but always reasonable.

The proposed itinerary for Friday, Sept 18: Meet and go out for a meal. 7.30pm Meditation. Bed.

The proposed itinerary for Saturday, Sept 19: 7am Meditation and Prayer, 8.00 Breakfast, 10.00am – 11.15am Talk 1, 12.40pm Lunch in Silence, 3.00 – 4.15pm Talk 2, 5pm Meditation and Prayer, 6pm Evening meal, 7.30pm DVD or talk, 8.30pm Meditation and Evening Prayer.

The proposed itinerary for Sunday Sept 20: 7am Meditation and Prayer, 8am Breakfast, 10.00am – 11.15am Talk 3, Mass, Lunch 12.40pm.

Chris Morris and Ruth Harrison will be keynote speakers at this year's oblate retreat at Pallotti College Millgrove Victoria. Chris will be giving a presentation entitled: 'Christian Wisdom for our Time: Exploring Bruno Barnhart's Sapiential Approach'. Ruth will be giving a presentation: 'Nature, sacred and sacramental, and the Christian vocation'. Both promise to be interesting and informative, providing contextual frameworks for broadening our spiritual perspectives as we move forward. There will also be time for silence, solitude, discussion, Eucharist and meditative prayer. As well

as good conversations over dinner. Costs will be detailed closer towards the time of the retreat.

For information regarding the retreat, please use the following email address: [kswolter31@gmail.com](mailto:kswolter31@gmail.com).

For those seeking further information about the retreat and for those intending to attend the retreat, please call Sue Wolter on 0439 130 158.

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The Vicar General in the Canberra cathedral gave a homily recently, in which, in part, he mentioned his name saint was St Anthony the Abbot. In another homily, he mentioned that he looked forward to meeting Abraham. There is something deep in the Vicar General's spirituality. It made me think of who I look forward to meeting.

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A desert hunter once was critical of St Anthony the Abbot when he saw him relaxing with his brothers in the desert wilderness. St Anthony called the hunter over and asked him to draw his bow, draw it further, and draw it further yet again. The hunter acceded twice but not thrice, declaring that the bow would break from overuse. St Anthony responded that his disciples needed their rest also.

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On paying attention to one's own progress. One day St Anthony the Abbot questioned many things as he worked. Lord, why is it that the wicked prosper and the good perish? Why do some die young while others live a long and fruitful life? An angel appeared and advised St Anthony to pay attention to his own lot and to leave the judgement of God to God. There's a good lesson for us all there.

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