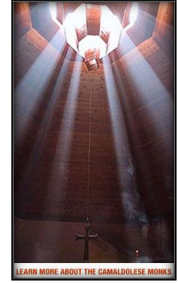




Speak Lord. *Your servant is listening.*

Newsletter of the Benedictine Camaldolese Oblates of
Australia, New Zealand and Mumbai
September 2017



Chaplain's Message Fr Michael Mifsud Oblate OSB Cam

Fellow Oblates, I greet you with waves of Peace at this very unstable and dangerous transition moment in Human and the World's Community of Beings' History/Story and Evolution of life and consciousness. Of course it's not dramatic words but concerted action and prayer that is needed [as St Francis said we can use words if necessary]. Down here in the snow country we have taken initiatives both at our Inter-Faith Ashram and in the Warburton Yarra Valley generally to promote peace in our own lives and inter-dependant relationships with all beings and to dedicate times and gatherings which we direct intentionally to this purpose hoping the pools of silent peace will ripple out in all directions.

I am sure you are all aware as we are of current situations and are already privately or publicly furthering similar initiatives of peace. *IN FACT IT WOULD BE GREAT TO SHARE THESE IN FUTURE NEWSLETTERS.* But now I ask you to intentionally, as Oblates, to join me and us down here, especially on Wednesday nights when not only Ruth and I meet as Oblates but when other Meditation/Prayer/spiritual/environmental meetings occur where we have decided to dedicate to Peace on Earth – usually anywhere from about 4:30 to 9 pm [depending on our meeting times and your availability. I think it was St Seraphim of Sarov who said “when one person finds peace, thousands are saved” [We need to save millions now – always only by Divine help].

On 6th September, with eye specialist's approval, I head off on my 6 yearly European pilgrimage [a troubled Continent], primarily to attend as 'your representative' the Open Sessions of our Camaldolese General Chapter at Monasterio di Camaldoli. I see it as a great privilege and am indebted to one of our first Oblates [Qld] to both join

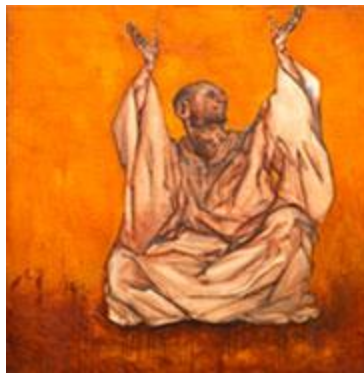
us in mid 90's and died around 26 December 2000. He kindly left me a legacy [nearly exhausted] to use for my oblate purposes such as these and visitation etc. You will all be in my heart and prayers as I convey your greetings and news to them and meet Thomas Matus, Daniel and Cyprian and share our hopes for next year's retreat, already put into motion with Hans' and Council's help.

I will pass on your greetings to the Assembly.

I recently at the end of July returned from a fruitful time in Sunny Queensland [yes delicious fresh fruit]. I enjoyed the whole time and experience in all its variety and personal encounters. As usual I had time at beginning and end of July to be near the sea on the Sunshine coast for R and R walking and enjoying sea, rocks and sand, meeting friends,

visiting zoo and seeing a few films.

As many of you know Glenn Wolter has been having intensive treatment for the spread of Melanoma. He and Sue have long been active Oblates serving and supporting our community. It is a difficult time for both of them and I am sure you will continue to prayerfully encourage them. I was given great hospitality by Maureen Cooper, their neighbour and great friend in every way. I spent a large part of 4 days visiting and talking with Glenn at his home sitting on the verandah overlooking their beautiful garden and valley. We shared much of our common spiritual journey revolving around his oblate commitment soon after we met in early 90's at Montserrat, Millgrove after we both separately had met and were blessed by Dom Bede's presence and teachings.



I also visited Margaret Stinson who magnificently and bravely has for years been carrying a debilitating illness. She is totally in touch via internet, with Oblates, WCCM etc and always in prayer. I went with Maureen to ACCM gathering at Montville giving a talk at the Meditation group's yearly meeting. We also walked and prayed etc with Sue and Glenn and local Zen and ACCM groups.

I had a great day in Brisbane again with the Wolters at monthly Zen Day and was asked to speak on my Inter faith experience and present Inter faith Ashram life, which is going very well.

I had another helpful retreat week alone at O'Reillys.

On 6 Sep 2017 I head for Europe for 6 weeks, first to Malta for 2 weeks staying with Carmelites [no men's Benedictine monastery there – but my cousin is a Benedictine nun near where my relatives live. Then on to Rome for 5 days to San Gregorio Magno where I will meet incoming OS monks and after 5 days on by train to Camaldoli for open sessions of Chapter, followed by train trip to stay with a friend at a Swiss Monastery near Lucerne.

I will visit friends in the UK and Glastonbury and Penzance and then spend 3 days with John Dupuche in Brittany as he presents a French Conference. I visit Mont Sant Michel and Celtic and neolithic Carnac then return to Rome again. I will stay with John at San Gregorio for Tantric and Christian Conference he is leading at The Gregorian Pontifical University [a first]. After this I return home on night of 21 October [With your prayers for safe and successful journey]. I will report to Council and you all after my return. Holding you all in my heart and prayers, with love and peace.

New Camaldoli Hermitage is open Fr Cyprian OSB Cam

Dear Friends,

Thank you once again for the marvelous outpouring of support, financial and otherwise, and concern over these last few months. I am not sure what we would have done without them, and we are all extremely grateful.

To recap: after the torrential rains of this past winter, Highway 1, pretty much the only access to

the Big Sur for nearly 80 miles except for a narrow windy road over the mountains just south of us, suffered numerous landslides, mudslides and rock slides, too many to be counted. The worst ones were just to the north and south of our own property here on what is known as the south coast. At several points we were cut off completely for a few days at a time, with no phones, only internet and walkie-talkie, and were on alert for helicopter emergencies.

When things finally calmed down the bridge over Pfeiffer Canyon, 25 miles north of us, had developed severe cracks and had to be demolished, cutting off access to and from the north; a huge landslide happened one evening 14 miles south of us at Mud Creek, dumping 5 million cubic yards of rock and dirt down and into the ocean, actually creating a new landmass on the coast (the surfers were thrilled about this!); and just south of us the outer lane of the highway washed into the ocean at a very tender spot called Paul's Slide, a 4 square mile active slide, part of which is actually on our own property. Consequently a good section of our own two-mile entry road was also badly damaged. At one point, as someone described it, it was like driving up a one lane stairway. It was never completely impassable for the brave of heart, which includes the heroic food and fuel delivery trucks, but it was dangerous. Due to the work on the highway, we have only had access and egress twice a day for the past four months, 5:30 AM and 7:00 PM. For any trips to town we have either had to cross over the mountains during one of those windows of time, or drive 25 miles north, leave a car parked on the highway, walk a trail to the north side of the canyon, and retrieve one of the cars that we have left in a temporary parking lot at Big Sur Ranger Station. It has been like an elaborate game of chess, trying to figure out the logistics of practical matters. In the midst of that we have endured several health crises and two deaths.

Throughout, the brothers have been tremendous and our staff has been loyal and resilient. It has allowed us to simplify, shift priorities, and really coalesce as a community. There has been a real spirit of joy and cooperation pervading New Camaldoli throughout the spring and early summer.

Finally I have some progress to report: Highway 1 is now open 24/7 at Paul's Slide (albeit one lane with flaggers); our maintenance crew has done a tremendous job of leveling off our own entrance road (although paving on both will have to wait until

the north opens); and we opened for retreatants and visitors this weekend, for the first time since January. Not only are we relieved to have a little income again, we are thrilled finally to be able to welcome guests. While we live a quiet eremitical life, hospitality is an essential element of all of our Camaldolese communities, and we have missed the gentle interaction we have with our friends and other pilgrims.

So, once again, thank you for all your support, and come and see us some time. Never have any of us appreciated so much nor been so respectful of the wild untamed beauty of the Big Sur that offers us hospitality to live out our contemplative life. With every good wish and our humble, grateful prayers, we bless you in the name of Jesus.

The Rainbow Cross Sue Wolter Oblate OSB Cam

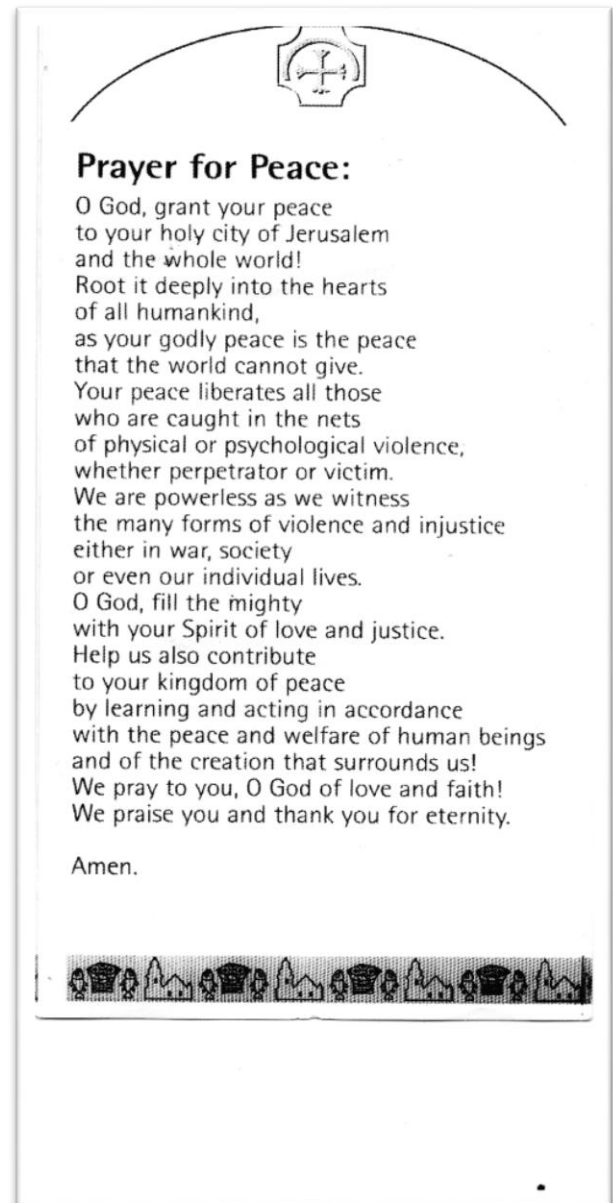
In 2012 we travelled to Israel and spent three days staying with the monks at Dormition Abbey, a Benedictine community on the edge of the old city of Jerusalem. We joined them in their daily office and learned something of their mission in this troubled part of the world. They host students, mainly from Germany, who come to learn more about their own faith as well as that of Judaism and Islam. Lecturers from these two faith traditions are included in the class presentations.

Just recently I found at home a brochure produced by the community called "The Rainbow-Cross" – Prayer for Peace. At the time of our visit I had not fully appreciated their commitment to peace in the world. This Rainbow-Cross has its origins in the desert, and can be found carved into rocks on the roads to Mt Sinai and in numerous old churches in Southern Lebanon.

For the monks the rainbow has always been a sign of hope and joy; the cross on the other hand stands at first sight for torture, suffering and death. Both symbols are united in this rainbow-cross. We pray that their witness continues on Mt Zion, the site of Pentecost.

More can be found by searching: Dormition Abbey Rainbow Cross

This is their prayer for peace:



NZ Oblate Retreat, Southern Star Abbey Michael Dougherty Oblate OSB Cam

Our retreat venue was an excellent choice as we were able to join the monks for Lauds, Eucharist and Vespers. This was the backdrop of our silence: the chanting of the psalms was positively simple, haunting and uplifting.

We decided that the theme for our time together should be to revisit Cyprian's four conferences

(Silence, Word, Music, Dance) that he gave us last September. We felt that they were so packed, that we wanted another chance together to unpack them – using the DVD copiest hat Phillip had made of them at the time.

Unfortunately the quality of the recording was not the best – though we could come to grips with most of the content for discussion and reflection.

John Mc Kay had agreed to give us one evening an input on the theme of which he called “Into the Rose Garden”. He focused upon the Four Quartets of T S Eliot with reference to the mystical path, with particular reference to the influence of Julian of Norwich and St John of the Cross. It was most informative, interesting and moving, as it was being presented by one who was passionate about his subject.

Another decision we came to was to spend most of the time in silence (except for the times of mutual discussion and reflection on the conferences). This included our meals together.

We appreciated greatly the hospitality of Sybil and Jim who were our hosts, and Maria who looked after our meals. It was wonderful on our last morning to spend time meeting and talking to some of the monks after mass. Fr John Petit managed to spend about half an hour with us the day before, which we greatly appreciated.

It was truly a time of renewing our friendship as Camaldoli Oblates in the spirit of Romuald and his companions of old.

Watch your thoughts Anthony Sharpe Oblate OSB Cam

Thank you Father. Thank you Son. Thank you Holy Spirit. Mother Mary, Queen of Heaven, pray for us.

St Romuald was a consecrated monk who wrote his rule for consecrated monks 1,000 years ago. His monks of today still apply themselves zealously to the precepts of his rule as one of the means of continuing the renewal of the manner of life of hermits in the life of the Church in the 21st century.

I want to touch here briefly on the third precept of St Romuald’s rule which reads thus: ‘Watch your thoughts like a good fisherman watching for fish.’ It appears to me that the fisherman is a symbol of the monk. And the good fisherman is a symbol of the good monk. In my mind, St Romuald is exhorting his monks to be good monks and that good monks watch their thoughts as they go about their daily rounds. For the oblate of the 21st century, the symbolism has to be stretched somewhat. The fisherman is a symbol of the oblate. The good oblate is the one who watches his or her thoughts as they go about their daily rounds (whatever they happen to be). Of course, there is a distinction of degree in all of this, as monks live the consecrated life of the Church whereas oblates do not.

There are thoughts that lead to an increase in Love. These thoughts expand the heart, renew the mind and lead the monk or the oblate to love the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and their neighbour more, both interiorly and exteriorly.

Other thoughts can lead to a decrease in Love. They can shrink the heart, gentryfy the mind and lead the monk or the oblate to be apathetic or indifferent to the Good Gifts of the Holy Trinity and to the very real needs of their neighbour.

Watching our thoughts then means dwelling on the thoughts that increase our capacity to love and doing our best to identify and discard the thoughts that lessen our capacity to love.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, help us to dwell on thoughts that will increase our capacity to love you and our neighbour as ourself. Mother Mary, remind us often to love God and to love our neighbour as ourself. St Romuald, pray for us, both monks and oblates. Amen.

*** **

Let us also continue to pray for the many needs of one another in the Camaldolese community and for the many needs in our very troubled world. Let us especially pray for peace, starting with peace in our own hearts and then irradiating that peace (the Lord-given peace) to those within our milieu.

'Be still' – the Psalms and Meditation*

Andrew Hede Oblate OSB Cam

The phrase 'Be still' in the Psalms has long resonated with contemplatives including today's Camaldolese oblates. John Main OSB, for example, teaches that 'Silence and Stillness' are the core of our daily meditative practice.

The Psalms have been central to Jewish prayer ever since they were composed three millennia ago. Also, the Christian Hermits from the Third Century AD embraced the Psalms and eventually integrated them into the Divine Office which has been practised from the Sixth Century by followers of St Benedict as well as most Western Christian monastics up till current times.

While exegetical analysis identifies 37 instances of the words 'still' or 'stillness' in the Bible, there are only three such psalm verses that have relevance for Camaldolese meditators, specifically: Ps 4:5, Ps 37:7 and Ps 46:11.

The most widely quoted 'stillness' verse from the Psalms is: 'Be still and know that I am God' (Ps 46:11). In the original Hebrew, the opening phrase of this verse is given as **הִרְפֵּי** which can be transliterated (reading R-to-L) as 'har·pū'. This is best translated into English as 'be still'.

The most obvious meaning of Psalm 46:11 is that if one can become still, one will become aware of God's existence. More optimistically, this verse may be interpreted to mean that if one can achieve stillness, one can actually know God directly. Whether or not this is achievable for meditators in their earthly life, stillness offers its own spiritual rewards (see below).

The second psalm verse that relates directly to the contemplative life comes from Psalm 4, namely: 'Tremble, do not sin; ponder on your bed and be still' (Ps 4:5). Here, the Hebrew term is **וַיִּמְדּוּ** with the transliteration 'wə·dōm·mū'. The best English translation is: 'be still'. As well as 'be still', the key word here for meditators is 'ponder' (**וַיִּמְדּוּ**) which implies that they should reflect on spiritual matters in order to 'be still' before going to sleep. While such a practice may well be spiritually sound, it differs from what modern meditators would call 'prayerful stillness meditation'.

However, the psalm verse which has the most compelling relevance for those who follow the modern contemplative life comes from Psalm 37, namely: 'Be still before the Lord and wait in patience' (Ps 37:7). Here, the introductory Hebrew phrase is **דַּיֵּן**, which is transliterated as 'dō·wm' and which is again best translated into English as: 'be still' or 'be silent'.

Consider the daily prayer practice of contemporary meditators such as Camaldolese oblates. In a spirit of unquestioning belief, they open themselves in their innermost stillness to the Lord's presence. They have no expectation that the Lord will reveal Himself physically. Rather, they are content to wait patiently (**וַיִּתְחַלְלֵן**) in the Lord's presence, which they believe is actual, albeit non-manifested.

The meditator who waits in patient stillness before the Lord (Ps 37:7) receives nothing except their own non-demanding waiting. It can be intrinsically rewarding for meditators to sit regularly in the patient belief that the Lord is nigh. It's like what occurs at the most vital events in human life (such as the wondrous and timeless watching of a newborn grasping at life or of a loved one peacefully letting go of this life).

Meditators have not only to 'be still', but also to be endlessly patient. While they hope to directly encounter the Lord's presence, they make no demands at all. Rather they are content to wait patiently should the Lord's presence ever become manifest.

Christian meditation in its evolving context, entails waiting ever-patiently for the Lord, as stated so concisely in this often-overlooked psalm (Ps 37:7). The challenge for Camaldolese oblates today is to develop the insights of the Psalmist who foresaw that inner stillness can provide such a rich support for meditative prayer.

★ *Based on an article printed in the newsletter of the Australian Christian Meditation Community (April 2017). The original Hebrew Psalm numbering is used. The English verse numbering and translations are from the Grail edition 1963. The author gratefully acknowledges the insightful feedback from Margaret Stinson.*