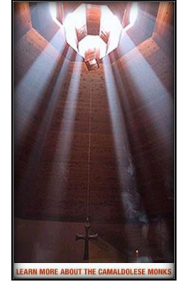




# Speak Lord. *Your servant is listening.*

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



## **New ardour, new methods, new expressions** **Fr Cyprian Consiglio OSB Cam**

It was my turn to preach and preside at Mass yesterday morning here at Camaldoli at General Chapter. It's the first time I've presided at Camaldoli and I was trying to do it bi-lingual, so I had a lot of prep work. It was October 5th, so I started out by saying that liturgically we find ourselves between the feast of St. Francis (October 4) and the feast of St. Bruno, the founding father of the Carthusians (October 6), something I had never noticed before. And that seems to me to be a pretty good place for a Camaldolese. In our history we have experienced both the longing for solitude like St. Bruno, as well as missionary zeal, evangelical zeal, even the zeal for martyrdom like il Poverello. For the most part we find ourselves in the middle of these two poles, a place of tension, but a tension that gives great creativity. The Gospel was Jesus sending the seventy-two out to proclaim the good news, but what really struck my attention was the first reading for the Book of Nehemiah. It seemed perfect for the occasion and made it seem all the more necessary to translate the homily into Italian, as you shall see in a moment. This little story captures not only an integral moment in the history of the Jewish people; it also points to the very heart of our liturgical approach to Scripture.

This scene takes place shortly after the return from exile, when they are rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. This is a people that has only faint knowledge of the actual covenant, and has probably never read nor even heard the Law of Moses. Ezra the scribe brings forth the Book of the Law that has been re-discovered, and he reads it to the assembled people. The problem is, it is written in a language that they no longer speak! So first of all he has to translate it into their vernacular. And then



Nehemiah and the Levites need to explain to them what it means. And the people are overcome with emotion at hearing these words explained to them for the first time. At first they weep, but the Levites tell them, No, this is a day to rejoice, to eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks (and allot portions for those who have nothing). And they did so—because they understood the words, the Scripture says. But they could not have understood the words unless Ezra had both read it and translated it, and they could not have understood the words unless Nehemiah and the Levites had explained it. There is an old American folk song that says that Jesus “opened the bread / and there was love inside.” And so, Ezra and the Levites broke open the Book of the Law as if it were bread, and showed them that this was indeed a covenant—there too, there was love inside.

There are several lessons to draw from this scene. The first is this: like the seventy-two that Jesus sends out in today's Gospel,

the challenge to preachers and catechists is to remember that these ancient words of Scripture and our Tradition are written in a language that people no longer understand. And it is not even enough to translate it into the vernacular; it is also recorded in a way of speaking that people may no longer understand. As the last popes have called for, what is needed is what John Paul II called for with the New Evangelization, “a new ardor, new methods, and new expressions.” We need to open the Word and the Tradition as if it were bread and show the people that there is love inside.

A second lesson we draw is that the Word of God always demands a response; whenever it is truly

heard by its very nature it elicits a response. The people of Israel wept, and then they rejoiced, and then they ate fine food and drank sweet drink and allotted portions to those who had none. We, instead, go to the altar in response, but not simply to offer bread and wine, but to lay our lives on the altar, our lives which will then be lifted up and accepted and consecrated—and then sent out like the seventy-two to spread that same saving Word, with a new ardor, new methods, and new expressions.

Finally specifically for us monastics: our own commitment to religious life has also been a response to the Gospel, to the Word, our Eucharistic offering. But perhaps religious life too, the contemplative life and specifically monastic life is written in a language that people no longer understand, a way of speaking that is incomprehensible. We cannot simply blame young people for their lack of ability to make a commitment, as is often the case. It is up to us to translate it for them, with new ardor, new methods, and even new expressions, to break it open and show them that there is love inside.

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## How I learned to pray (and love) the rosary

**Deacon Joseph Leach Oblate OSB Cam**

When I was young we prayed the rosary frequently in my family as was the custom and, indeed, the expectation. This was an important prayer for the, mostly Irish, church in Australia. It kept the faith alive as the liturgy of the domestic church when distance and poor roads meant that priests and the opportunities to attend mass were few and far between. It was, however, a prayer that I always found difficult. This was because it seemed to be asking me to do two things at the same time: to say the Hail Mary (which was a noble prayer, containing both scripture and response and certainly deserving of attention) and to reflect on the ‘mystery’ for that decade (normally an incident from the gospel and, again, most certainly deserving of my attention).

This dual aspect was not simply a matter of my perception, nor was it accidental. It comes from the history of the Rosary itself which was formed by combining two very different devotions: the simple office of the lay monks, fifty Hail Mary’s or Our

Father’s, with the Prayer of the Hours: a series of gospel meditations popular among wealthy women in the Middle Ages. It was and is intended to anchor the meditative tradition of repeated prayer firmly in the gospel.

However, try as I might, I couldn’t do it. I couldn’t think about two things at once and the stress of trying to do so wearied me. As a result, for many years, as I grew up, I left the rosary behind me. Of course, no one can really multi task in this way. The human mind simply cannot do it. Sometimes it is claimed that women can multi task and men can’t. Not true. No human can actually think of two things at once. Women are simply better than men at rapidly switching their attention from one task to another. The stress I felt was the stress of trying to do the impossible. As I said, the human mind simply cannot do it – the conscious human mind, that is.

Of course, the unconscious, what tradition would tend to call the heart, will often do its own thing, regardless of what the conscious mind is doing. In particular, as the great Russian spiritual classic “The Way of a Pilgrim” points out, with practice, it will often establish a pattern or rhythm of prayer that continues even as the conscious mind is engaged in its own, mundane tasks. This surely is the purpose of the prayer word in meditation: to bring the conscious mind into the rhythm and prayer of the heart: the place where we can come to know ourselves to be in the presence of God. There is, perhaps, something of the duality of the rosary also present in meditation: the mind is busy with the word while the heart rests in silence.

Here, then, is the key to praying the rosary: a key my younger self was too rational to understand. I found this key while preparing the vigil rosary for my mother’s funeral. I choose, as is customary, the glorious mysteries and prefaced each decade with the short passage of scripture from which the intention of that decade was derived. Here, in those words, I came into the presence of The Word, and in the rhythm of the repeated prayer that followed, my mind could enter into the cave of my heart where I could rest in the presence of The Word and listen to Him: listen even, or perhaps most particularly, to His silence.

The Rosary thus becomes an exercise in *Lectio Divina*: the act of *lectio* followed by *oratio*, leading to the *meditatio* of the mind within the contemplatio

of the heart. This takes a bit of organisation, for example, in selecting the gospel passages to be used and having them on hand, and it takes a good deal longer but it is a prayer to be cherished and entered into deeply.

The words lead to The Word. The rhythm of prayer leads to the silence, to the quiet, to the stillness, where God is known to be God. This is how I have come to learn to pray the rosary. This is how, I think, my ancestors, with their instinctive awareness of the sacred, prayed this prayer, without the necessity of walking this long and tortuous road.

### Tanka on solitude

#### Andrew Hede Oblate OSB Cam

Images of Mt Solitary (Blue Mountains, Australia)



*Dawn*



*Dusk (same day)*

floating in dawn mist  
 aflame with sunset at dusk ~

*Mt Solitary*  
 in its far-side shadow  
 I seek solitude

full moon high ~  
*Mt Solitary* looms  
 in silhouette  
 as my mind becomes silent  
 I retreat into stillness

beyond the mountain  
 the deep calm of solitude ~  
 endless night  
 a new dawn at last  
 my soul renewed

### The path you must follow

#### Anthony Sharpe Oblate OSB Cam

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

The fourth precept of St Romuald's rule reads thus: 'The path you must follow is in the Psalms – never leave it.' In this precept, St Romuald also advises about attentiveness when praying the Psalms and perseverance in the face of distractions.

The Oblate Rule suggests that oblates pray morning and evening prayer, both of which contain Psalms and Canticles. By praying thus, we may be said to be following 'the path...in the Psalms...'

The Church urges pray-ers of the Divine Office to learn more about the Psalms as a way of enriching their understanding and thus the quality of their prayer. Many commentaries on the Psalms are available in Christian bookshops. There are also a range of study courses available. I guess a good complement to all of this would be to join or to form a discussion group of like-minded Psalm Pray-ers.

The Camaldolese Hermits of America have published a beautiful volume of their Lauds and Vespers. I know one oblate who feels a very special and a very close connection to New Camaldoli Hermitage by using this volume here in Australia. It can be ordered from the Hermitage Bookshop, the details of which can be found on the website.

Concerning praying the Psalms, it is interesting to me to note the trend away from quantity to quality. For instance, I have heard that an ancient Irish Abbott had his monks pray the entire 150 Psalms daily. Then Saint Benedict distributed the 150 Psalms over one week in his Rule. The Divine Office distributes the Psalms over four weeks. And Saint Romuald advised that it was better to pray one Psalm with attention rather than 100 Psalms without.

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, help us to pray the Psalms humbly, lovingly and attentively. Mother Mary, remind us often to meditate on the Psalms. St Romuald, pray for us, both monks and oblates. Amen.

## Tarore

### Phillip Saunders Oblate OSB Cam

Recently, a Maori Minister reminded Phillip about the following Maori story.

In 1835, The Bible Society published 100 copies of the Gospel of Luke in the Maori language. In 1836, missionaries gave one to a young Maori girl, Tarore, at a mission school near Matamata.

She read it to her father, the chief of the Waikato tribe. She kept her treasured copy of the Gospel of Luke under her pillow when she slept.

Under threat of a neighboring warring Rotorua tribe, the mission school was in the process of relocating to Tauranga. On October 19, 1836, at the Wairere Falls, a raiding party killed the 12-year-old girl and took the treasured object from under her pillow.

Later, unable to read, the Rotorua chief discarded it until a slave boy came along who had learned to read, and he revealed its contents to his fascinated listeners.

The Rotorua chief himself was convicted by its contents and resolved to become a Christian. He also resolved to seek out the father of the murdered girl and beg for his forgiveness. This mission was, of course, life threatening. When finally confronting the father, Nga Kuku, the chief of the Waikato tribe—and risking the customary tribal response of revenge—the father of the murdered girl forgave him, and thus began a peaceful relationship between the two previously warring tribes!

A young girl murdered... A devastated father refusing to seek revenge... A murderer transformed through the Gospel he stole from his victim... Then forgiveness given and peace achieved!

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Chasing The Wild Goose is a book on the story of the Iona community. There are many resonances with



our own community, this paragraph particularly so.

At an isolated place on the island of Iona there is a circle of stones. It is called the

Hermit's Cell. It testifies to the need for times of withdrawal, in order to go back to the demanding and joyful task of Christian community, a community which is not an end in itself but is struggling to be a sign of the in-breaking of God's rich kingdom of shalom.

## Fr Michael's journeys

### Anthony Sharpe Oblate OSB Cam

Fr Michael has been unable to provide his Chaplain's Message for this edition of the Newsletter due to



health issues with his eyes. Please keep him in your prayers. As you would be aware, Fr Michael attended the General Chapter at Camaldoli and undertook other travels to a range of marvellous sites, photographs of which he emailed to all oblates. I have included the above, his prayer-portrait of this particular community.

## Sobriety

### Br Alberto OSB Cam

At the General Chapter this fall at Camaldoli, Br Alberto, the vice-prior of the Sacro Eremo, gave a conference on the Camaldolese spiritual life. In it he brought up the concept of sobriety, *nepsis* in Greek, a very important concept for Orthodox Christian theology and the hesychast tradition of Eastern Christianity. This paragraph from Alberto's conference could serve as a suitable entryway into the spirituality of Advent.

'Sobriety, according to the monastic fathers, consists in the vigilant attention to permitting neither the heart nor the intellect to be distracted, getting drunk on fantasies, thoughts, useless words, idle matters that serve only to swell pride. Sobriety thus produces silence in the soul, but not only that. Sobriety makes it so that consciousness of our sin is established in us, calm but deep, and therefore an awareness that life is made possible to us only by the mercy of God and by the mercy of others, giving witness that we are pilgrims on the earth. It is not given to us to possess anything. We must live as if [we had no possessions...] (1 Cor 7:30). The only reality that we possess and that no one can take from us is Christ in us. To believe, to hope and to love. Attention: the strength to hold tight to something. To something. Not managers of a calm unhappiness, the great trap of renunciation, the mortal sin of not expecting anything more. The strength of beginning, without being delusional. God is always beginning. Perhaps to make an opportunity out of tiredness so as to rediscover the transforming strength of the Gospel. The Gospel has a freshness that is always inviting. To live Advent. To surrender to the mystery that draws near. To rediscover a vitality free from resentments, animated by the obedience that comes from faith. To know how to entrust oneself to a greater call.'

## Several Haiku

### Will Day Oblate OSB Cam

Will my eyes ever rest  
on the large rust-winged bird  
glimpsed from the  
fast train.  
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The cuckoo clock long gone,  
at three a.m, half awake  
I hear its call.

The blind softly taps  
at my window frame.  
How still this mid-morning  
light.

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Spied amidst  
lingering plum tree leaves,  
the swelling half moon and I  
touch.

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*After Reading the Cloud of Unknowing*

My gratitude scoured centuries,  
found a springtime hermitage,  
empty.

*Vipassana*

Sitting, I track my body.  
Basho's winter pilgrimage,  
shrine after shrine.

