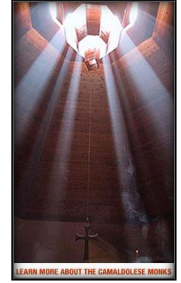




# Speak Lord. Your servant is listening.

Newsletter of the Benedictine Camaldolese Oblates of  
Australia and New Zealand  
March 2018



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

Dear Friends, just a short message to thank you all for your prayers as my eyes after December operations continue to slowly but surely improve and medications decrease.

After a big year of Transition for us personally and collectively, both as Oblates and humankind [let alone all creation] we now enter a year of The Great Unknown. Of course in the Spiritual Journey that is always part of it.

It is a time I believe which calls for great faith, trust and surrender. We embark on another year of the lived Paschal Mystery together made clearer as we approach Holy Week.

Glen has accomplished his Passover along with Sue, family and friends. I hope another time to give Glen a more reflective Memoriam as a close, long time dear friend. We presently keep Glen and Sue close to our hearts and in our prayer.

Of course we await Fr Thomas Matus with great anticipation in our coming National retreat which I hope you will all make ample provision for in your priority diaries. Thanks for all helping to bring it to fruition, The Council, especially Chris Morris, Sue, and Ruth, including Hans who is slowly recovering from his terrible bike accident late last year.

I always look forward to catching up with you and sharing on my visits and hope to see more of you before the Retreat. Thanks also to Anthony who does a sterling job on the Newsletter. We also welcome back Trudy and Alwyn now to lucky

Canberra and Antonia Lehn who is interested in our community and is getting to know those in Canberra and beyond. We remember her mother Martha Walter who died recently.

Let's keep each other in faithful loving prayer. Peace.



## Sydney, NSW Fr Paul Durkin Oblate OSB Cam

It was good to welcome Fr Michael with us in late January. Andrew Howie and I gathered with Pat Curew and Ray to have an afternoon of prayer, sharing, discussion and food.

We appreciated the US *Camaldolese Oblate Handbook* which Fr Michael sent us recently. Andrew Hede and Marie Gundersen remain committed to the solitary contemplative path.

## Newness of the Christ Event Chris Morris Oblate OSB Cam

I am working on a doctoral thesis exploring the work of Fr Bruno Barnhart. It continues to be a source of great stimulation and spiritual nourishment. (Also wonderfully challenging). One of the keys to Bruno's work is his insistence on the newness of the Christ event. In Christ wisdom became incarnate and everything changed. The first access point to this new wisdom is to simply be open – to be struck – to be amazed by this event in some way (just as the

many disciples were when they first met Jesus – *they left their nets; they were utterly amazed by his teaching* etc.). As Bruno says, it is the sheer *Newness* of Jesus that is so compelling. I find these words of Bruno very enriching:

*Jesus brings an essential newness – let the mystery stand as a burning mystery of newness – a flame that is contagious and that wants to set fire to everything and transform it – it is a revolution from law to freedom – from an exterior structure to an interior principle of life – a gift of divine creativity into the human person...an expansive transforming energy that's within the human person that moves outward into the world.*

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## National Retreat 2018

### Sue Wolter Oblate OSB Cam

It is usual for one of the Camaldolese monks to visit us here in Australasia to run our oblate retreats. Fr Daniel conducted one in NSW in 2014, Fr Cyprian in Victoria in 2016 and this year we are lucky to have Fr Thomas Matus, a very experienced man living the contemplative consecrated life of the Church.

The retreat will run from after lunch on Friday 5 October 2018 to after lunch on Sunday 7 October 2018 at the Community of the Holy Name, 40 Cavanagh St, Cheltenham, Vic 3192.

The cost is \$65 per night (fully catered). Non-residential retreatants will be accepted at a rate of \$40 per day. However, priority will be given to residential retreatants booked for whole retreat. The maximum number of retreatants is 25 if a small number are willing to share rooms.

There will be an added cost to cover Fr Matus' stay and a donation component. Council will discuss this in coming weeks.

Places are filling fast. As of this newsletter, five oblates have booked places. So if you want to ensure a place at this not-to-be-missed event, please contact me as soon as possible as per the following. I can be telephoned on 07 5446 0158 or emailed at walliwolter@bigpond.com.au for further details.

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## The presence of God Anthony Sharpe Oblate OSB Cam

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

The Son always realised he was in his Father's presence and stood before him with reverence, crying out aloud and in silent tears: *Abba, Father – (Daddy, Daddy)*. Absolutely stunned, the Apostles asked the Son to teach them to pray, so that they too could honour the Father's presence. The Son obliged and taught the Twelve to pray in God's presence. They, in their turn, taught members of the nascent Church about praying in God's presence, and their successors – in communion with Saint Peter's successors – have continued this teaching down through the ages.

As a lad, Master Romuald would have been schooled in some manner in this aspect of Catholic Tradition. And more formally so when he became a monk of the Order of Saint Benedict. God graced Saint Romuald to renew the manner of life of hermits in his Church. Saint Romuald therefore wrote his own Rule, and in the fifth precept he taught his monks to *Realise above all that [they] are in God's presence, and [to] stand there as one who stands before the emperor*. His monks of today follow this teaching, and we, as oblates, are privileged to share something of this aspect of Camaldolese Spirituality.

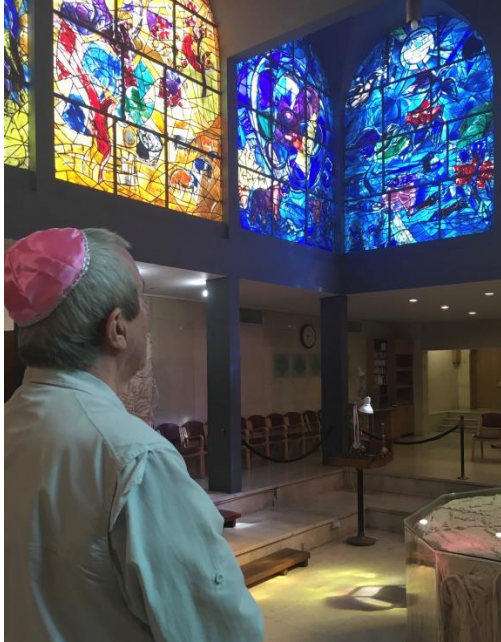
Concerning realising God's presence, a Successor of Saint Peter, Pope Benedict XVI, wrote: *God is...silent, mysterious, seemingly absent, and yet omnipresent...So*, following Saint Romuald's fifth precept is very much an ongoing faith-based matter. For instance, when God is silent, the mind can wander. It is here that we need to call to mind St Romuald's third precept about *watch[ing] [our] thoughts like a good fisherman watching for fish*. The thought we want to catch and to take hold of is that God is present and that we need to be reverent in his presence.

Holy Trinity, help us to realise your omnipresence and to stand before you in reverence. Mother Mary, remind us often of God's presence and of his grandeur. St Romuald, pray for us, both monks and oblates. Amen.

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## Tanka on waiting Andrew Hede Oblate OSB Cam

Hadassah Synagogue, Jerusalem - Chagall windows



waiting with patience  
without expectation ~  
    deep in wordless prayer  
following the Psalmist \*  
I wait in stillness

observing my mind  
as it pursues distraction ~  
    *supra-mindfulness*  
but my mind's still busy  
my prayer mechanical

I keep wondering  
whether the Lord is present ~  
    why my need to know?  
finally my prayer connects  
with the stillness of waiting

## Song Phillip Saunders Oblate OSB Cam

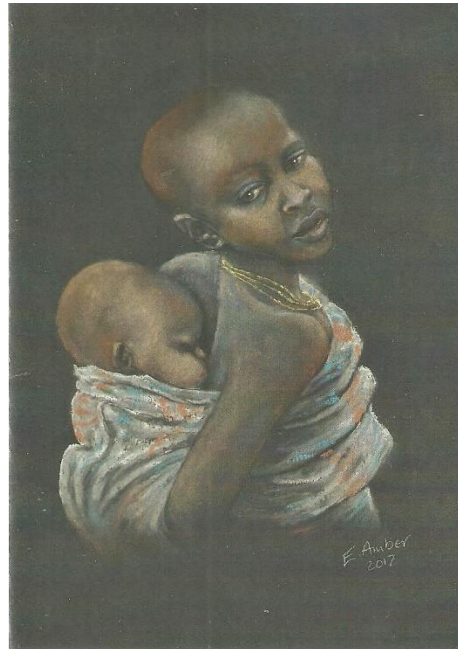
O my soul give praise to the Lord  
I will praise the Lord all my days  
Make music to my God while I live  
I will dance for my Lord all my days

My spirit rejoices in my God  
This Love enfolds my life  
Gives birth to a new life in eternity  
Dance a new dance so Divine

Published on 11 December 2017, the first verse is a setting of Psalm 146. Praise, music and dance in this mortal life. The second verse is based on the reflections of Janet of Whangarei, New Zealand – on birth into eternal life. The first line of the second verse pays homage to the Virgin, important to Janet as part of her life's journey – Mary Seat of Wisdom. The title suggested by Janet is a phrase used by Fr. Richard Rohr OFM in his book *The Divine Dance*. This video was made in the Church of St John the Baptist, Te Waimate. With thanks to the Parish of Waimate North, New Zealand.

The video of Phillips's song can be viewed at:  
[https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=6juupc\\_heQs](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=6juupc_heQs).

## Mother and Child Elizabeth Amber



## Peter Damian – the heart of a reformer Fr Cyprian Consiglio OSB Cam

We have yet another feast right here in the beginning of Lent, Peter Damian of Fonte Avellana on February 22. One author wrote concerning St. Peter Damian that, *His energy and spirit, his learning and achievements mark Peter Damian as one of the outstanding personalities of the 11th century, if not the entire Middle Ages.* We, of course, claim him as one of the greatest saints of our Camaldolese congregation, mainly because he was the biographer of Romuald. He was a major proponent of the eremitical life, though he himself spent very little time as a hermit. [i] The congregation that he headed was in large part cenobitic as well. But he is also known in the rest of the Church for his work in greater ecclesial reform. He was much sought after for advice by a series of popes, and eventually named bishop of Ostia and then a Cardinal. That's when his efforts at reform in the greater Church were particularly strenuous. He got involved in protecting the rights of the Church against secular corruption; the secular clergy and the episcopacy were especially weighed down by simony, nepotism and general moral laxness.

I couldn't help but wonder: what is it that fires the heart of a reformer? If it's just someone who has a personal agenda, the reform is going to go nowhere. St. Francis of Assisi wouldn't have lasted; Romuald wouldn't have lasted; the Trappists wouldn't have lasted if their reform was only their personal agendas at work. Like Saint Peter Damian, the true reformer's zeal is always rooted in personal conversion, and the reform grows from out of that. It's an organic thing. If we try to orchestrate it, it's destined to fail. Francis heard the call: *Rebuild my Church.* But that was based on him rebuilding Francis first. This is the lesson we have to learn from Peter Damian—not to go out and reform, but to go in and reform. His first movement was there—to the inner journey, to the inner work, to the monastic conversatio.

The thing is, if we do this work of conversatio, we never know where the Spirit is going to take us, what the Spirit is going to do with us when we have been molded into what the Spirit wants us to be. We might be sent to evangelize! We might be sent to our deaths! And we might be called not to do anything but stay home in our cell and sit waiting, patiently,

content with the grace of God. But that's not our business.

Our business is to be clay in the hands of this God, to reform our lives continually and make ourselves available to the Spirit. Whatever we do even in terms of our own inner healing and growth, what we do in terms of personal conversion itself, is a gift to the Body. You could draw this vision from what Peter Damian himself wrote to a recluse at Sitria, in what I think of as the most eloquent defense of the eremitical life: *The Church of Christ is united in all her parts by such a bond of love that her several members form a single body and in each one the whole Church is present.* Perhaps this is another way of saying St. Paul's famous aphorism: In my body I make up what is lacking in the suffering of the Body of Christ. [ii]

It goes both ways: what goes on in us is also important to the whole Body; on the other hand what goes on in the Body is important to us. One of Peter Damian's most vehement polemics was *Adversus Canonicos—Against the Canons.* (The canons were an order of priests who lived in community following a rule similar to monks. They usually staffed cathedrals, which was often an honorary position.) At Peter Damian's time there was a lot of corruption in the ranks of these canons. Apparently some of them wanted monks to be forbidden from ecclesiastical apostolate, basing their argument on the fact that monks, and especially hermits, are supposed to be dead to the world. So why are they meddling in the apostolate? They didn't want some annoying ascetic coming in and telling them how to run their parishes, their cathedrals or dioceses. They even thought that monks shouldn't exercise the office of priesthood because their monastic vocation impeded it. Peter Damian answers, as Don Anselmo wrote, with *irony worthy of the subject*, that it's *precisely for this reason, that we are dead to the world and profess a life in perfect antagonism with the principles of the world, that we have the liberty to act in the ecclesiastical field.* In other words, who better to speak about any matters concerning the Church, than those who have died to riches and power, those who have no agenda or personal claim, those whose lives are hidden with Christ in God.

Furthermore, Peter Damian writes, again in *Adversus Canonicos—Against the Canons*:

We don't know why and in what way you want to separate us from the consort and the unity of the Church, when it is indeed certain that the Catholic Church was not founded or governed by canons. The Apostles that founded the Church and the supporters of the Church did not live in your way, but in our way. So the Evangelist Luke refers in the Acts of the Apostles; so Philo, the Hebrew doctor, calls the first Christians monks, not canons, and their houses monasteries, in books written in praise of us.

Then he goes on to cite Moses and Elijah, and just about everyone on the pages of the New Testament, saying they are monks not canons. For Peter Damian the monastic life—or should I say, the contemplative life—was the very center of the faith, this life of being hidden with Christ in God, and from out of that everything else did and just about anything could flow. And flowing from that, monastic community is the model of the apostolic Church.

There is a line in Peter Damian's biography of Romuald that Romuald wanted to turn the whole world into a hermitage. Thomas suggested to me once that didn't necessarily mean that Romuald wanted everyone to live as solitaries, but that he wanted to be able to share with everyone the gifts of contemplative prayer, that mystical experience that is the heart of the energy of Christianity, the shift of consciousness and the fresh new way of thinking that grows from it. Is this not the same in Peter Damian's case? His monastic conversatio led him not only to insights about the Church, but energy to incarnate and enact those insights. This I think is the legacy of people like Bede Griffiths, John Main, and Thomas Keating, who preached the message of the *universal call to contemplation*. And contemplation then becomes the core and motivation for everything else. It's the experience of union with God engendered by the experience of contemplative prayer; it's a new way of seeing the Gospel that only the contemplative life can offer that they were spreading—not just a specific way of being a monk, since they all lived it in such different ways, Romuald, Peter Damian, Bruno the Carthusian.

If we are living true to our vocations, if we have really died to the world, then not only do we have a gift to offer the rest of the Church—we become the gift that we offer to the rest of the Body. Let's pray for that ourselves, for the fresh new way of thinking that

comes from our experience of union with God through prayer and meditation, and the energy to embody it and enact it.

[i] He actually had harsh warnings for any monk who puffed himself up because of his hermit status: *Let it never be that the hermit swells himself up as a privilege of a more perfect life, when perhaps he doesn't equal many others who, even though in a lesser state, walk the more sublime way.* [ii] Col 1:24.

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## Christmas Reflection 2017 Michael Dougherty Oblate OSB Cam

This happening is  
beyond our comprehension  
it is so much in  
our face  
from  
a viewpoint  
of  
hype  
froth  
glitter  
sales  
that we slip into an  
unconsciousness  
of the  
Reality  
which can only be accessed  
as a grace received  
The reception of such  
can only  
come  
when we pause  
long enough  
in a stillness and silence  
that surrenders control  
and waits with vulnerability  
eager patience.  
That expresses  
a faithfilled  
loving trust  
beyond our ability  
to fabricate  
A grace ever received  
like conception  
like birth  
like life itself.  
Immanuel  
*God with us!*