



THE OBLATE

Newsletter of Newark Abbey Oblates

Issue 32

Fall 2017

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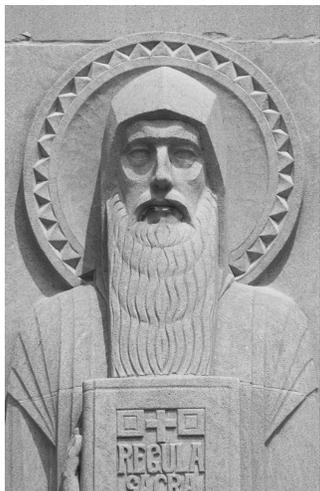
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“Do not grant newcomers to the monastic life an easy entry, but as the Apostle says, *Test the spirits to see if they are from God* (1 Jn 4:1)” (RB 58:1)



FOCUS—Past & Present

Kristen Wisniewski

Whew! It’s been a while since the last newsletter, and so there is a lot to report.

September 2016, the newest arrival of the monastery, Br Asiel Rodriguez, OSB, gave us a presentation on St Augustine’s Rule and community. Very similar to St Benedict, St Augustine was called to more leadership and roles in the church that they did not want. Br Asiel gave us a hand-out with the short (8 chapter) Rule written by St Augustine, and we were able to see some similarities with St Benedict’s Rule. Around 150 communities around the world still follow the Rule of St Augustine including Dominicans, Mercederians, Norbertines, and Augustinians.

In October the Oblates tried a new experience and attended a retreat day at the Shrine of St Joseph in Stirling, NJ. See separate article on page 7 for more information on this day.

November 12, brought around our annual Oblation renewal, and with it a presentation by Abbot Melvin Valvano, OSB. It’s always a special time when Abbot comes and shares his vast knowledge with the Oblates. On this occasion, the Abbot spoke on prayer. He said that “Prayer is the most important human activity possible. Every human is connected to God essentially and spiritually with God.” Fr Albert added a short presentation on the Kingdom of God being among us, and not just something that will come after we die. He stressed that the Kingdom is in the spaces between us, and it’s up to us to decide how we fill that space. Fr Albert’s suggestion was to fill it with love!

An Oblate Service day was on tap for December. Several oblates came to 8:45

mass, enjoyed a Calandra’s donut (provided by Alice Moore) and then commenced the cleaning of the church for the Christmas season. Even though the number of monks has grown in recent years, they always appreciate the oblates being able to help.

The new year started with a talk from the 2015 NAABOD (North American Association of Oblate Directors) Meeting. Sr Karen Joseph, OSB gave a talk titled “BE SALT! BE LIGHT! BE FULLY ALIVE!” Her main thrust came from a quote from the Rule, “Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way.” (RB 4:20). She stressed that we as Christians, and especially Benedictines need to be examples and blessings to the world. Moderation is not mediocrity! Christianity is a life style, not just a theology. Salt is only worthy when it is used. So we need to “use” ourselves to help others.

February’s meeting brought one of the newest members of the community to share his story about how he arrived at the abbey. Br Simon-Peter Clayton shared a brief biography of his life so far. A very interesting young man it was great to hear how God works in interesting ways! His biography is published on page 3 of this newsletter as “Meet A Monk.”

March was a very busy month! It began on the 11th, when Fr Albert Holtz, OSB presented 3 conferences for the Lenten Day of Recollection. Fr Albert returned to one of his earlier books “Street Wisdom” and spoke on the difference between “mastery” and “intimacy.” We as Christians need to stop trying to be perfectionists. That is not what Christ called us to. Some examples from scripture of mastery and intimacy are Luke 12:35-37, where the servants are comfortable being “doers,” we need to develop a part of ourselves that will accept help. Another example is in Mark 10:46-52, the story of

Continued on page 2...

Focus Cont...

blind Bartimeaus. In the story, Jesus hears his voice and stops. Are we too wrapped up in our own selves to see the needs of others? A third example is in John 2:1-11, the wedding at Cana. The Blessed Mother presents Jesus with a problem and not the solution. This shows she had no mastery over the situation and left it to Jesus' wisdom to solve the problem. We need to learn to have an intimate relationship with God, and not one of mastery. Like when Moses approaches God in the burning bush. God will not allow Moses to put him "in a box."

Following later in the month, on the memorial of the Passing of St Benedict (March 21), Br Maximilian Buonocore, OSB was ordained to the transitional diaconate on his way to ordination in the priesthood. Then on March 27, Brs Simon-Peter Clayton, OSB and Asiel Rodriguez, OSB professed simple vows.

On the feast of St Catherine of Sienna (April 8), the Joint Meeting of NJ oblates was held at St Walburga's Monastery, Elizabeth, NJ. The speaker, Therese M. Saulnier spoke on "Seven Deadly Attitudes." These include, Attachments, Aversions, Comparisons, Anticipation, Expectations, Competition, and Judgments. These attitudes keep us from growing and interfere with our relationship with God. These attitudes keep us from being open and helping others. "So get rid of your old self, which made you live as you used to—the old self that was being destroyed by its deceitful desires. Your hearts and minds must be made completely new, and you must put on the new self, which is created in God's likeness and reveals itself in the true life that is upright and holy." (Eph 4:22-24)

May, the month of Mary, Fr Albert Holtz, OSB presented on the 100th anniversary Our Lady of Fatima. This was especially appropriate since we had our meeting on May 13th, the feast day of Our Lady of Fatima. We watched a short video, had some discussion, followed up by a communal praying of the rosary to commemorate the day and be in solidarity with the universal church.

June 8th we were privileged to hear Oblate Mary Ellen Doran speak about various Marian Apparitions. She had just returned from a trip in which she traveled on pilgrimage to France to Lourdes and to Spain where she visited Garabandal. The Blessed Mother has always been a part of Mary Ellen's life as she remembered having a statue of Mary in her childhood home, and her grandmother who lived with her saying a daily rosary. She spoke of the different apparitions from around the world, with special attention on Lourdes. Mary Ellen also shared a documentary about Garabandal with all of us. (Note: the apparitions at Garabandal are still being investigated by the church.)

Another exciting event during the month was the priestly ordination of Fr Maximilian Buonocore, OSB on June 22, by Cardinal Tobin in the Abbey church.

In July, I presented a DVD video on Thomas Merton, entitled "The Many Storeys and Last Days of Thomas Merton." Director Morgan Atkinson, tells the story of Merton's last few months, including his Asian journey. It's a very well thought out documentary, as it weaves the events of Merton's life with what was going on in the country at the same time, the Vietnam war, racial unrest, assassinations etc. Several people are interviewed including, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Fr Richard Rohr, OFM, Sr Kathleen Deignan, CND, Fr James Martin, SJ and others.

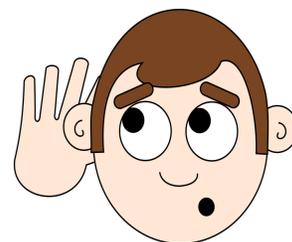
August's heat brought with it the yearly community celebration of Monkfest. The annual barbeque was well attended and again the oblates manned the grill to feed all the hungry attendees.

Newly ordained Fr Maximilian Buonocore, OSB was our speaker in September. It seemed only appropriate as he had just taken the next step in his vocation (being ordained to the priesthood) that he share his story of his vocation. He shared his story of growing up with his brothers in an Italian family that was very religious. He shared with us specifically how the story of the Canaanite woman (Matt 15:21-28) influenced his life thus far.

The Shrine of St Joseph was the site for the October retreat day again this year. See separate article.

November 11th was a very special day in deed. It started off with Abbot Melvin Valvano, OSB, accepting Br Francis Woodruff, OSB's temporary vows at the community mass. This was followed with a delicious brunch in the monastic refectory. A short meeting followed brunch with Fr Albert using the occasion to speak on the 3 vows that Benedictine monks take at profession, and how they specifically apply to the oblates. We finished up the day with Oblation renewal and midday prayer. On top of all of that, it was also the 45th anniversary of the blessing of Abbot Melvin as Abbot of Newark Abbey. All around a wonderful day of celebration!

God gave us 2 ears and only 1 mouth. So we should take St Benedict's advice and LISTEN twice as much as we talk.



Meet A Monk—Br Simon-Peter Clayton, OSB

Born and raised in Newark, New Jersey, Brother Simon-Peter Clayton OSB attended Saint Benedict's Prep in Newark and graduated with a Bachelors of Science in Marketing at Saint Vincent College in Latrobe PA. Prior to graduating in 2012, Br. Simon-Peter secured a job with PNC Bank as a retail banking Branch Manager in Washington, DC. After spending a few years in the financial industry, Br. Simon-Peter decided to answer God's call to return to his hometown and join the community of Benedictine monks at the Benedictine Abbey of Newark. Br. Simon-Peter wishes to answer God's second calling to the Priesthood by attending the Immaculate Conception Seminary School of Theology in the Fall.



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

November 11	Oblation Renewal / Profession of Br Francis Woodruff, OSB	
December 9	Spiritual Interview with Fr Albert Holtz, OSB	Veronica Dagher
	Service Day—Cleaning of St Mary’s Church for Christmas Season	
January 13	St John’s Bible	Mark Graceffo
February 10	Formation of Conscience in Complex & Changing Times	Julian Slowinski, PhD
March 10	Lenten Day of Reflection	

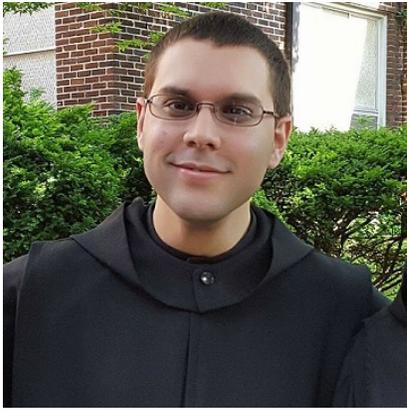
Oblate Meeting Recordings

Recordings of several of the monthly oblate meetings have been made, so that those who couldn't attend a meeting can still hear our excellent speakers, or for those who were there to listen again. These will be published on the website soon. An email will be sent to the mailing list when they are available. This will be an ever expanding archive, so check in regularly!

<http://newarkabbeyoblates.org>



Meet A Monk—Br Asiel Rodriguez, OSB



I was born in the city of Camagüey, Cuba on July 11th of 1991. My mother's name was Irma Montes de Oca and my father's is José Manuel Rodríguez. Both of them are originally from the same city. At the time I was born, we were suffering the called "special period" since the

entire country was left in miserable conditions after the fall of Russia. The decade of the 90's was a hard time for each and every family, and so it was for mine.

So I never knew who God was during my early years. Yet I used to pass by the cathedral frequently and I remember I was so curious about what was inside of that gigantic building with a big and white cross on top of the tower. My curiosity as a child drove me to the point of drawing the "gigantic building" with a cross on top in one of my notebooks. When my teacher found it, she asked my mom to take me to the psychologist. I have to say that my grandma (from my mom side) was a blessing at that time, and continues to be so for her simple explanation on faith and prayers. God was still not known by me, but now I know he was there holding my hand since the beginning.

I was a normal guy who didn't like school too much. All teenagers fall in that kind of laziness. I was just like that. I limited myself to go to class and do my homework somehow.

On the other hand, at the age of twelve, I was invited by a good friend of mine to go to church. Pedro, my friend, had been a good brother and so was his family with us. They were catholic and were involved in the parish life. I was baptized when I was still a baby, but never went back to church until I found this wonderful family. I did my preparation for first communion and for confirmation. I have to say that my parish priest was so great to me and welcomed me to any kind of help such as altar server, catechist, director of missions in the parish and coordinator for the youth pastoral. I was well known for my responsible character, so I used to serve at the high mass in the parish on Sundays and then spend the rest of the day with the pastor serving the other little communities of our church. I loved being involved in social projects, teaching the kids catechetical classes and preparing couples

for the sacrament of marriage. I felt so happy to serve them and lend a hand to my pastor. I used to rent a car then (with some of my savings coming from my dad) and take the kids from suburbs once a year so that they could see what a real church looked like and walk the city for a day. I knew I was taking a risk but I believe that it was God who gave me that courage to do so much crazy stuff when I was in my "teen years."

I studied my 7th, 8th and 9th grades in the same school, very close to my house. But I wasn't allowed to get any of my two options I had applied for my career (architecture & scenography) because I was known as a catholic leader in my school there. So I had to take some classes at an engineering school to keep me studying and finish high school. (In Cuba we study our high school year alone with a chosen career.) I only went there for a couple of months because soon they realized that I was a practicing catholic. I was then asked to get involved in some communist organization but I denied my signature. I was given a second chance but I told them I was not going to renounce my faith. In response I was given a public expulsion. After that, I wasn't allowed to study in any of the schools in the city. They would just ignore you for the rest of your life. Instead of wasting my time, I had the opportunity to continue my help in the parish. I felt so committed to others. I did that for a few months until I got my visa to emigrate. In the meantime, my father had started the paperwork to bring both of us (my brother and I) to the US. It took almost seven years of impatient waiting.

At the age of fourteen I came to live in Union City. I learned English (it was prohibited to learn it in Cuba), and studied in Union Hill & Union City High School. Those years of study were amazing accompanied by my family and greatly supported by my new classmates. I started going to Mass again here in the US the first weekend. Then I found a friar who led me to get involved in the life of the parish. Fr. Blas Montenegro was one of those "key" persons although he was already eighty years old. He was a hardworking Spaniard man. Indeed he was a father, counselor, teacher, brother, a "grandpa", a friend and a true blessing. Very soon he introduced me to his Augustinian Recollect community. I went to school, had a wonderful girlfriend, got a part-time job, and a beautiful family. When I graduated in June of 2010, I was transferred to Madrid, Spain and lived there for 6 years.

First of all I have to say that monasticism has been on my mind since I was in my first year of philosophy. I

Meet A Monk—Br Asiel Rodriguez, OSB Cont...

used to read a lot about monastic life and its authors especially Cistercians and Benedictines. But I was already in an apostolic community and never thought I was going to end up in a monastery! I remember I used to watch Benedictine videos on YouTube and listened to their chants for hours. I learned Gregorian chant in my first year of Theology and cultivated always the silence in my room and in my surroundings. I took very seriously my experiences of silence and retreats. I never liked traveling, for I consider myself a social and conventual person at the same time. Actually I remember seeing a Benedictine monk at Seton Hall meetings a couple of times when I was a senior in High School; he was Br. Patrick from Newark Abbey and my curiosity pushed me to speak with him and we became friends really quickly. During these years of formation we have strengthened our communication. It was last summer that I came for the third time to the abbey and spoke with him about my desire to pursue monastic life in Newark. I spoke with Abbot Melvin, and I can't explain what happened after that conversation. I challenged myself to find out if the Lord was calling me to come as a Benedictine monk. After almost six months of discernment I gladly communicated my decision to become a monk to my friend Br. Patrick. I come to Newark Abbey as a brother and open to obey, live a constant conversion to monastic way of life and enjoy my vow of stability. I know that there might be some challenges to overcome but maybe the most difficult for me is community. Dealing with different personalities, tastes, ways of understanding monastic life require dedication and patience. I firmly believe in this wonderful and exciting plan that the Lord has proposed me and so I know that he will give me the strength to love my brothers and work hard as we pursue God in this holy place.

Prayers for Perseverance and Good Works

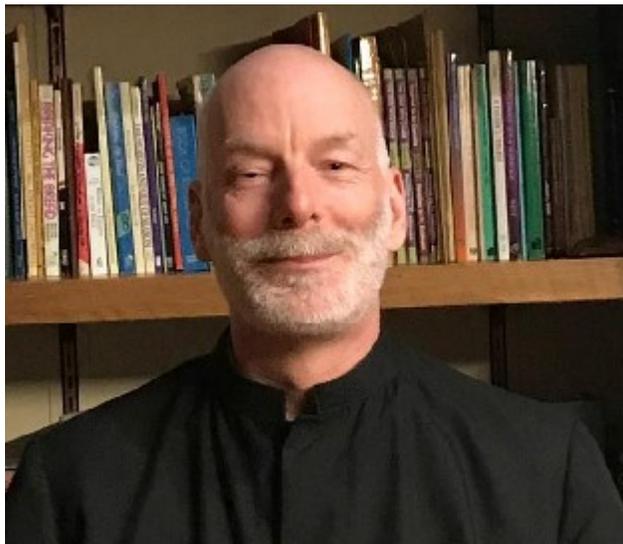


Fr Maxmilian Buonocore, OSB was ordained to the priesthood on June 22, 2017



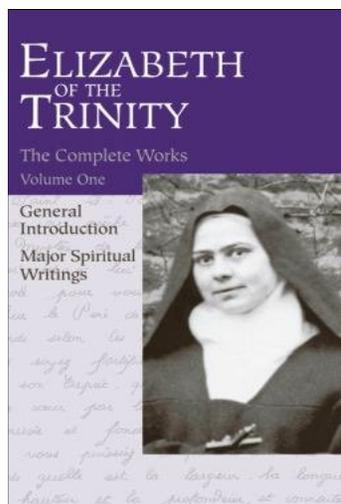
Br Simon-Peter Clayton, OSB (left) and Br Asiel Rodriguez, OSB (right) welcome Postulant Mark Dilone (center) to the monastery.

Br Francis Woodruff, OSB professed simple vows on the Feast of Martin of Tours, November 11, 2017.



Book Review: Elizabeth of the Trinity: The Complete Works, Vol 1

Sue Scudder



I would strongly recommend the book, "Elizabeth of the Trinity O.C.D." - The Complete Works, Volume 1 (translated by Sister Aletheia Kane, O.C.D). It provides a great way to learn more about Elizabeth of the Trinity who was recently canonized on October 16, 2016.

Elizabeth of the Trinity (Elizabeth Catez) entered the Carmel of Dijon, France at the age of 21 in 1901. She died

shortly after that at the young age of 26 in 1906.

Although only a Carmelite for a short time, her spiritual writings are a great treasure for all of us on our spiritual journey.

This book contains her major spiritual writings. Included in her spiritual writings are two sets of retreat notes: 'Heaven in Faith' and 'Last Retreat.' During the retreat "Heaven in Faith", Elizabeth of the Trinity helps us see that the 'kingdom of God' is within each of us, where through our baptism, the Trinity dwells in our souls. She shows us that to be able to dwell deeply in union with God in the center of our soul we need to work on a detachment from worldly desires. By doing this, our love for God becomes greater. As we are more centered in God, His love will gradually transform us more into His own image. Elizabeth helps us see that when we truly die to self and are filled with His consuming love we can exclaim like her "I have found my heaven on earth." The paradox of this detachment from worldly desires is that when God's love transforms us, we are more able to serve others with love in our lives. We become more like Christ who came to serve not to be served.

The spiritual writing of the 'Last Retreat' is based on the retreat on August 14, 1906. Very ill at this time, Elizabeth sensed that this would be her last retreat. She continues to stress a union with God even in this life, by walking with our eyes fixed on God, even in crucifying circumstances. This she says requires forgetfulness of self and interior silence. It is in her great physical pains at this time in her life that she is able to identify with the crucified Christ. At one point she writes "He has substituted me for Himself on the Cross." It is in her deep love and faith that she is able to desire to accept her

suffering. During this retreat Elizabeth desires to be conformed to the crucified Christ.

Elizabeth conveyed that her mission in Heaven would be "to draw souls by helping them go out of themselves in order to cling to God by a wholly simple and loving movement, and to keep them in this great silence within which will allow God to communicate Himself to them and to transform them into Himself." I pray that this book with the spiritual writings of St. Elizabeth of the Trinity will bring you to exclaim like her "I have found my heaven on earth."

Also included in this book is her prayer to the Trinity. It starts out as follows: "O my God, Trinity whom I adore, help me to forget myself entirely that I may be established in you as still and as peaceful as if my soul were already in eternity." The prayer ends: "O my Three, my All, my Beatitude, infinite Solitude, Immensity in which I lose myself, I surrender myself to You as Your Prey. Bury Yourself in me that I may bury myself in You until I depart to contemplate in Your light, the abyss of Your greatness."

January's Oblate Meeting

January's meeting will be a special opportunity to see something unique. Mark Graceffo, an Oblate of Newark Abbey will bring a volume of the St John's Bible (SJB) to present at the meeting.

The SJB is the first handwritten, illuminated bible in about 500 years. It was commissioned by the Benedictine community of Saint John's Abbey / University in Minnesota. It's was an amazing undertaking by calligraphers, artists, and theologians, that took about 10 years to complete. Every letter of the bible was handwritten and the illuminations were done with traditional techniques as were practiced in the middle ages. When His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI was presented with an Apostles Edition of the SJB, he called it - "A work of art, a great work of art..... a work for eternity."

<http://www.saintjohnsbible.org/>



Oblate Retreat Days at Shrine of St Joseph

Kristen Wisniewski

For 2 years in a row now, October's monthly meeting has been an extended day of retreat at the Shrine of St Joseph in Stirling, NJ. Both of these days, Fr Dennis Berry, ST, the Director of the Shrine has been the presenter.

Located in Stirling, the Shrine was first established by the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity founder, Thomas Judge, CM. It stands today as a place of healing and peace. Located on a hill, on acres of land, it is serene and quiet place to pray, reflect and just be. (<http://stshrine.org>)

In October of 2016, Fr Dennis presented on "Communio." This is the idea of us (as humans) living in communion with the Holy Trinity. The word comes from 2 Latin roots for one, and with. So we are to be one with the Trinity. Pope St John Paul II wrote heavily on this subject in his post-synodal apostolic exhortation "Christifideles Laici." He states that Communio is the "mission and vocation of the laity."

Fr Dennis stressed that it is our job to start with the people around us, as they are made in the image of God. So we are to treat all others as if we were dealing directly with the Holy Trinity. Starting with ourselves, we need to bring this gift to others, so that it will spread throughout all. We as humans need to feel loved, cared for, respected and honored, no matter what we did, or who we are. This is the right of each human. So as the old recycling slogan goes, we should "think globally and act locally!" The church is meant to be the place where we can start, and continue to grow this mission.

Fr Dennis gave a specific example that seemed to hit home. He said that the Missionary Servants (his religious order) was helping a refugee family from Syria by giving them housing and some other assistance. Several people from the parish came to him angry after he announced this and said "why can't you do this for us?" He thought about this and said to himself, "Who is US?!" Aren't we all US? He said the way you can tell if you are growing in Christ is to ask yourself if you are truly reaching out and helping others.

To help us in our relating to others, Fr Dennis gave us "7 steps to comunio." He said that the keys to communion are forgiveness and mercy.

Step 1, is to remember, but not resent. Don't hold on to your hurts and anger. Step 2, Ask forgiveness of God and others for things you have done. Be sincere with your apologies. You would want nothing less for



yourself. 3rd step is to forgive others. Even if they don't seek your forgiveness. For your own well being, be willing to forgive others. Confession is step 4. Share your burden with another. Get some perspective. Step 5, receive forgiveness, healing and help. Learn to accept forgiveness and forgive yourself! 6th step, restore what has been broken or damaged by sin. And the last step, 7, make peace, and be an apostle of peace!

October 14, 2017 a group of oblates returned to the Shrine for our annual retreat day. Fr Dennis was again gracious enough to accept our invitation to lead the day. This year's topic was "Habibi: The Beloved of God"

Fr Dennis started by talking about the Blessed Mother and how she is the sort of "poster child" for habibi. She had to learn that she was beloved by God. She had to learn that she was loved by God and teach Jesus how to be a good Jewish man and that he also was loved by God.

Some of the questions posed to us for the meditation time were these "Do you know deeply that you are the "habibi" of God, God's beloved? How did you come to know this?" Followed by a second question, "If not, what might be keeping you from knowing that you are the "habibi" of God, God's holy and beloved?"

Jesus' primary mission was to teach the world that they are all habibi. All loved by God. This is the mission that got him killed. He had compassion for all because he realized that everyone is habibi. Once Jesus is killed, Mary's role changes and she picks up his mission to strengthen the disciples and continue to tell everyone that they are habibi.

Being the beloved of God (habibi) doesn't mean that everything is going to be sunshine and rainbows. Every time Jesus showed himself after the crucifixion, he is seen with his wounds. They weren't taken away, but they were transformed. We need to learn how to transform our own wounds. We have to keep in our minds that we belong to God, and to have the vision to see through the tough things we are experiencing now. Gratitude and acceptance need to be our goals, with no regrets. Regrets are the wounds we can't let go of. Like they are the final word. This is not true. The final word is habibi: the beloved of God!

"Let the church always be a place of mercy and hope, where everyone is welcomed, loved and forgiven!"

-Pope Francis





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We Remember in Prayer:

- ✚ Colleen Currier, Friend of Oblate Kristen Wisniewski
Born into Eternal Life March 24, 2017
- ✚ Laura Smith, Sister-in-law of Oblate Sue Scudder
Born into Eternal Life October 15, 2017
- ✚ Frances Morrison, Oblate of Newark Abbey
Born into Eternal Life October 29, 2017
- ✚ Kathleen Kennedy, Friend of Oblate Kristen Wisniewski
Born into Eternal Life October 31, 2017
- ✚ Regina Scherer, Sister of Oblate Alice Moore who is seriously ill
- ✚ Michael Brennan, Brother of Oblate Don Brennan who is fighting cancer
- ✚ Jacob Quainoo, Oblate who is dealing with health issues
- ✚ Bill Gleeson, Oblate who is dealing with health issues
- ✚ Fr John Gorski, MM, who is dealing with health issues
- ✚ All effected by natural disasters, violence, and famine
- ✚ The Newark Abbey monastic community, that the whole community continue to grow in love for God, each other, and the good works they perform. Also specifically for the newly professed, postulant and inquirers, that they have perseverance to continue down the narrow road.
- ✚ Vocations to Newark Abbey and Religious Life

Did You Know ??

- ✚ Nov 11, 2017 (feast of St. Martin of Tours) was the 45th anniversary of Abbot Melvin's Blessing as abbot of Newark Abbey. Mass included the profession of temporary vows of Br. Francis Woodruff.
- ✚ Br Simon Clayton, OSB and Br Asiel Rodriguez, OSB, professed temporary vows on March 27, 2017.
- ✚ Fr Maximilian Buonocore, OSB was ordained to the priesthood on June 22, 2017 Please pray for his continued perseverance and priestly ministry!
- ✚ Mark Dilone, a postulant, was accepted to begin novitiate for Newark Abbey in early January.
- ✚ Fr. Francois Diouf, OSB and Br. Louis Adario, OCSO continue living in the monastery with an eye toward possibly transferring their stability.
- ✚ As a member of the Episcopal Diocese of New York's Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force, Oblate, Veronica Dagher facilitated a roundtable discussion about human trafficking at the diocese's global mission fair. She often volunteers with the task force helping with trafficking education and advocacy initiatives. She also leads workshops for LifeWay Network (lifewaynetwork.org), an anti-human trafficking charity. Fun fact: Fr. Al's sister, Sister Regina Holtz, serves on Lifeway's Board of Directors. Veronica will present on this topic in a future monthly oblate meeting.

Editor's Corner

Questions, suggestions, submissions or miscellaneous comments should be directed to
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