



From Sister Anita Louise

The season of summer vacations is winding down, so it can be a good time to consider the journeys and trips we may have taken this summer or even in earlier seasons and years. A vacation differs from a pilgrimage, though, and, in this issue, we want to share about times in which we have been on pilgrimage...on a spiritual journey.

Pilgrimages and spiritual journeys change us. If we have truly entered into the journey, we are different at the end than we were at the beginning. I remember my first trip to Rome. It was December 31, 2007...literally on the threshold of a new year. It was also the threshold for me moving from one ministry to another (vocations to liturgy). I was traveling to attend a two-month intensive study of the Rule of St. Benedict under the guidance of Sr. Aquinata Bockman, one of the leading scholars on Benedict and his Rule.

On some level, I knew that embarking on this journey would change me. I would be returning with new insights into the Rule and how to apply it to my life and the lives of others. I would have the experience of visiting numerous holy sites, i.e. Subiaco, Monte Cassino, Assisi, Rome, and Norcia. I knew that I would be different when I returned, and that was a little scary!

I remember standing at the airport with my back to the security line as I said goodbye to Sr.

Michelle Mohr who had driven me to the airport. And I just kept standing there. Finally, she said to me: "Now turn, and go!" Sometimes we need a nudge to take the first step on a spiritual journey! "Turn and go!"

There have been times since then when I have realized that I am embarking on a journey that will have a profound change on me, for example my first trip to Peru. Each time, I have felt a bit of that hesitation, the realization that by making this trip, I will be changed. The words from 2007 often echo in my mind at such times: turn and go.

I invite you to consider times of pilgrimage, of spiritual journey in your life. They don't have to be as long or as far away as a trip to Rome or Peru. Consider journeys in which you have been changed. And the next time you have the opportunity to participate in a pilgrimage, if you need a little nudge, I invite you to hear these words in your own heart and mind: "Now turn and go!"



"Wow" Moments

Lynn Belli, the Oblate Communications Coordinator, posed this question to the oblates who attend the retreat: What was your "wow" moment during retreat time? Here are the responses:

"A beautiful friendship building weekend, with other oblates and Sisters. It was also an opportunity to reevaluate and renew my calling to live the life of an oblate."

"I was touched by openness and bonding in our sharing of experiences, questions and insights sparked by the powerful words of our presenters. For me, it culminated in Shirley's call to find our 'people.' This retreat encourages us—together—to be drawn into expanding ways of being people of presence, hospitality and inclusive community. Much gratitude to all who arranged the retreat."

"Being surrounded by 'my people' for a weekend, sharing our faith and getting to know them on a more personal level was and is still my WOW moments!"

Traveling in Circles

Stephanie Smith, Oblate Director

Italy. Land of beauty, wine, culture, wine, history, wine, pasta, wine, my maternal grandparents, and—did I mention wine?

The retirement dream has always been to move to Italy. In 2008, I started the process of applying for dual citizenship, and on this trip I finally obtained the last piece I needed: my grandmother’s birth certificate. The application is now very close to complete. It was everything I’d hoped it would be—the trip of a lifetime, arriving just as I was wondering where the next chapters of my life would be written.

I spent four weeks on my own and two with my friend and fellow oblate, Mary, who always guarantees a little excitement.

Those first weeks alone came with plenty of stress. I was driving a larger vehicle than I wanted through narrow village streets, navigating Italian roads with some of the craziest drivers in the world, while knowing very little of the language (though I learned as I went). After one particularly harrowing day of constantly changing speed limits, literal V-shaped turns, roundabouts with two dozen signs, and a Google Maps voice whose Italian pronunciation I couldn’t match to the road signs, I finally made it back to my beautiful, quiet villa. I lay down just to get my heart rate back to normal.

I loved visiting San Quirico d’Orcia, but every outing came with a pit in my stomach knowing I’d have to drive back. Some days I was downright terrified to leave the house.

Then I had a talk with myself. I reminded myself that I was a 70-year-old woman, alone in a foreign country, speaking very little Italian, driving on



crazy roads—and I’d made it this far. More importantly, I wasn’t really alone. God had taken care of me every step of the way.

I never did enjoy the driving, but I came away with one of the biggest lessons of the trip: people are kind. Not everyone, of course. But most people.

The caretaker of my villa, Magi, shared a glass of prosecco with me most evenings. She invited me to dinner several times with her partner, Alessandro, and his business partner, Leo. Alessandro’s mama, Gracia, became so dear to me that I cried when we said goodbye. We went to the beach, attended Mass together, and shared lunch afterward at her daughter’s nearby agriturismo. Alessandro made my favorite pasta, cacio e pepe, and taught me how to cook it. They made me feel safe, happy, and loved.

After a week in the gorgeous heat of Puglia, in the heel of Italy’s boot, Mary and I decided to spend our final week in the cooler climate of Ireland. Before we left, we were welcomed into Francesca’s home for what became half a cooking lesson. She would have finished it, but we needed an intermission so Mary could visit the nearby ER for three stitches—a story for another day. Italian healthcare, by the way, is very good and very free.

Instead of sending us back to the hotel afterward, Francesca took us home for lunch with her and her three daughters. We talked and laughed for two hours. And yes, I’m still in touch with both Magi and Francesca.

There were so many other moments. A young couple from the Netherlands who struggled with the Italian bus system alongside us and, four days later, stood at the front of the train waving goodbye as we headed in different directions. An Australian couple who helped me with my luggage and cheered me on as I ran—or at least attempted to run—to a train 20 platforms away with only three minutes to spare. (No, I didn’t make it. But there’s always another train.)

As I traveled through these countries and met so many warm, generous people, I kept remembering Shirley’s advice: “Find your people.”

In Italy, I found people who could be my people. I hope they’ll remain part of my life, and I fully intend to return—hopefully for extended visits, though not permanently.

Because through all the travel, the adventure, and the fun (and there was plenty of fun), I found myself missing this Hill. The Hill and everything it represents: a deeply fulfilling way of life, the women who have devoted themselves to it, my Sister friends, my oblate community, and the love, safety, and joy I find among them.

I may have traveled in circles, but in the end, I realized I’d already found my people.

They’re here.

“I may have traveled in circles, but in the end, I realized I’d already found my people.”

Missioning Day

Missioning Day is one of the most meaningful annual rituals in our life here in Ferdinand. It is both a liturgical celebration and a communal commissioning in which every sister receives a blessing for her ministry in the coming year. Rather than being merely an announcement of job assignments, it is a prayerful reminder that all work is a participation in God’s mission. This year our theme is “stirring into flame the gifts of God that we have received.” Sr. Anita invited us to sit with the gifts each of us has to offer the community and reflect upon how we can stoke the flame that God has placed in our hearts as we celebrate our daily life together.

In the Benedictine tradition, prayer and work (ora et labora) are inseparable. Every sister has a ministry, whether it is teaching, healthcare, parish ministry, spiritual direction, administration, hospitality, environmental stewardship, monastery service, caring for a family member; all are a form of serving within the community itself. Missioning Day recognizes that each ministry—public or hidden—is equally valuable in seeking God and serving others.

We celebrate Missioning Day at the conclusion of our annual July Community Days. During a special prayer service, the prioress calls each sister forward individually. She presents the sister with her mission for the coming year, offers a personal blessing, and commissions her to carry out her ministry in the spirit of St. Benedict. The ceremony emphasizes that ministry is not simply employment but a vocation entrusted by the community and lived in communion with Christ. We also renew our vows and our commitment to live the Benedictine way of life faithfully in prayer and in ministry. At the end of the prayer service, we then close with a communal blessing and an offering of the sign of peace to one another.



“Thunder & Lightning” (Pasta e Ceci) Recipe

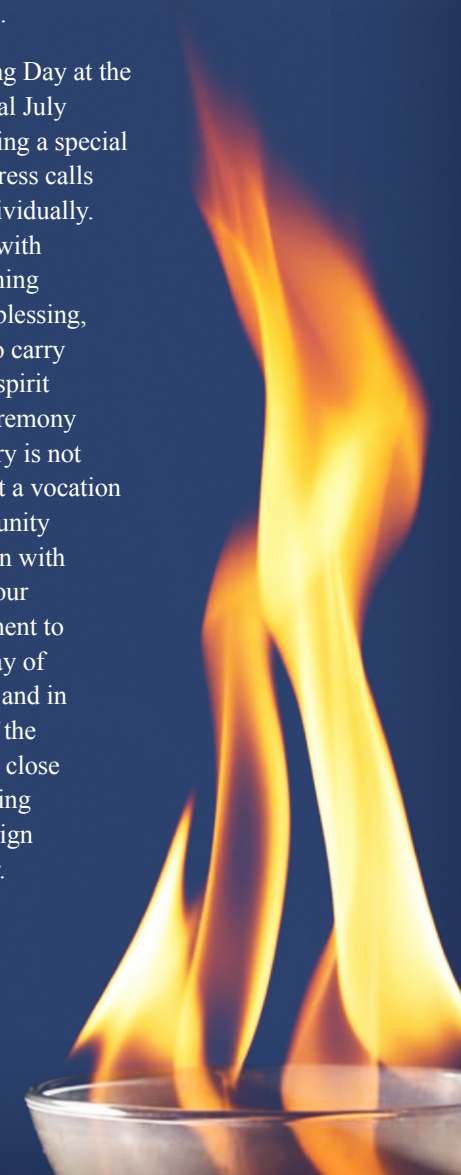
In celebration of the Feast of St. Benedict which was July 11, we wanted to share a rustic Italian peasant dish because it recalls the story of St. Scholastica praying for a violent thunderstorm to keep her twin brother, St. Benedict, at her monastery. The profusion of crispy chickpeas represent the “thunder” and the kick of cracked black pepper represents the “lighting.”

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 large clove garlic, minced
- 2 tbsp olive oil
- 1 cup cooked chickpeas (garbanzo beans)
- 1/2 tsp finely slivered fresh sage (or basil)
- 1/2 cup of vegetable or chicken broth (vegetable broth)
- 6 oz dried orecchiette or pappardelle pasta
- 1/2 tsp coarsely cracked black pepper
- 1 tbsp butter
- 1/2 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Cook the pasta in boiling, salted water until al dente (about 12 minutes).
2. Meanwhile, in a large skillet, cook the garlic and chickpeas in olive oil over high heat until the chickpeas begin to pop.
3. Stir in the sage, broth, and black pepper. Continue cooking on high heat for about 5 minutes until the broth reduces to a syrupy consistency.
4. Drain the pasta, toss with butter, and combine directly into the skillet with the chickpea mixture.
5. Remove from heat, gently fold in the cheese, and serve immediately.



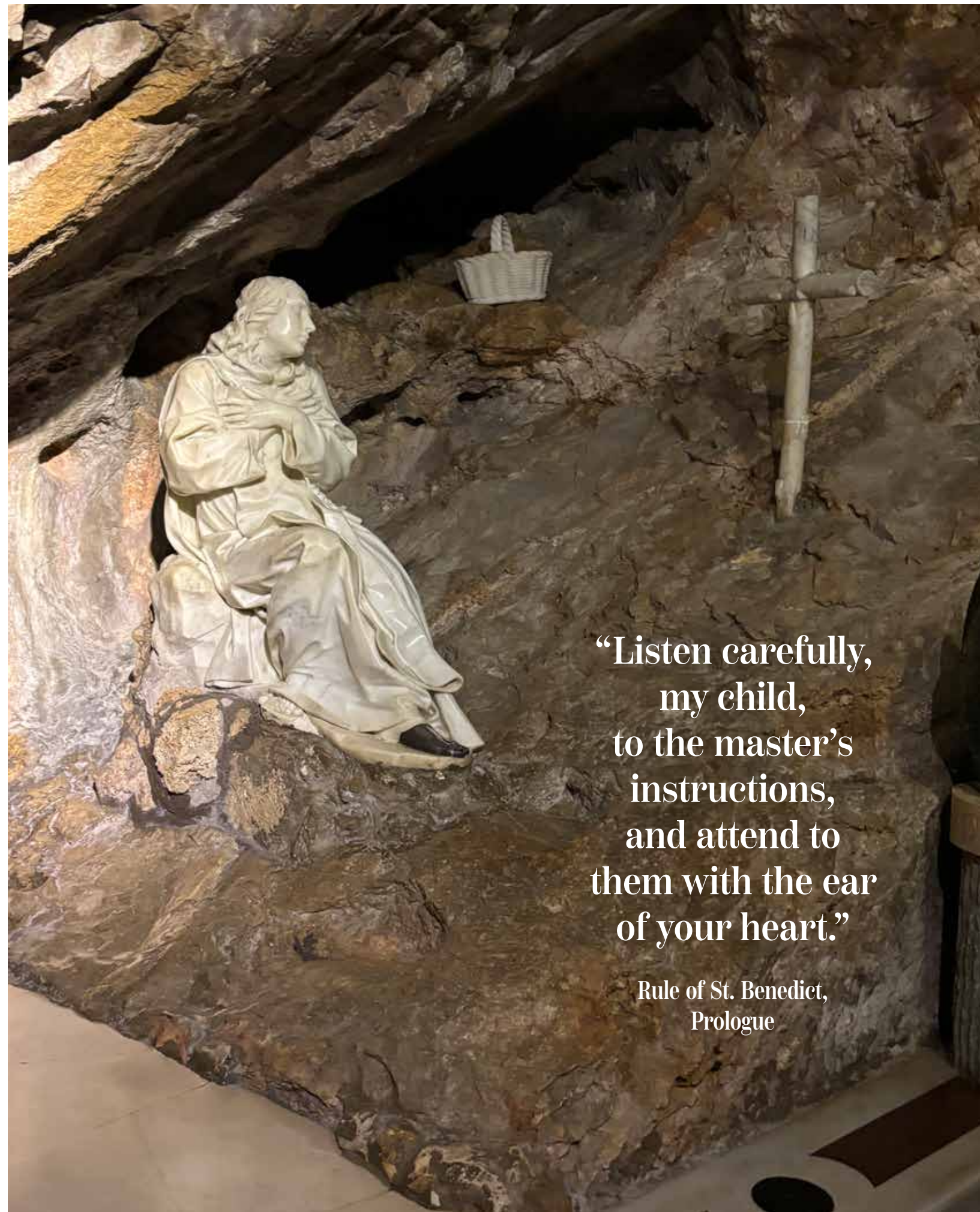
Reflection for the Solemnity of St. Benedict

Sister Becky Mathauer, Oblate-
Sister Liaison

On July 11, the Church celebrated the Solemnity of St. Benedict, patron of Europe and father of Western monasticism. Yet if Benedict were standing among us today, he would probably be uncomfortable with all the attention.

He never set out to become famous. He never intended to shape civilization. He never imagined that 1,500 years after his death, people around the world would still be reading his Rule and seeking wisdom from his life. Benedict was simply a humble man who wanted to seek God and recognize Christ in others.

Perhaps that's the first lesson he offers us: holiness begins not with great plans, but with a sincere desire to seek God and the humility to let Him lead.



“Listen carefully,
my child,
to the master’s
instructions,
and attend to
them with the ear
of your heart.”

Rule of St. Benedict,
Prologue

The World Benedict Left Behind

To appreciate Benedict’s gift, we need to remember the world in which he lived.

Born around the year 480, shortly after the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West, Benedict lived during a time of political instability, violence, uncertainty, and social upheaval. Institutions were crumbling. Old certainties had disappeared. People were anxious about the future.

In many ways, that sounds very familiar. We live in a world marked by division, conflict, rapid change, and uncertainty. Many people wonder where stability can be found, while others struggle to discover meaning amid the constant noise and distraction around them.

When Benedict looked at his world, he didn’t seek political power or spend his life complaining about society’s problems. Instead, he withdrew to Sacro Speco—the Holy Cave—to seek God in silence and prayer. At first glance, that may seem like an escape, but it wasn’t.

Benedict sought God in the midst of the world’s chaos because he understood something profound: if the world is to change, hearts must change. Hearts change when they encounter God—often through one another. The transformation of society began with one person listening for God’s voice. Sometimes that’s all it takes.

Listen with the Ear of Your Heart

The first word of the Rule of St. Benedict is simple: **Listen.**

Listen quietly, attentively, openly, and lovingly. That is striking because our culture rewards the loudest voice. Phones buzz. News never stops. Social media constantly demands our attention. Opinions compete for space in our minds, creating both internal and external chaos.

Yet God most often speaks in whispers. Benedict knew that unless we cultivate silence, we may never hear that voice. This became especially clear during our pilgrimage to Italy last month.

Listening with the heart means hearing God’s invitation in Scripture. It means recognizing Christ in the stranger, noticing the needs of others, and paying attention to what the Holy Spirit is stirring within us.

The Search for God

Benedict believed that life’s fundamental purpose is the search for God. That conviction shaped everything, beginning with his decision to leave Norcia and seek solitude in Subiaco. Everything else flows from that.

Success, achievement, recognition, and possessions can never satisfy the deepest longing of the human heart. Only God can.

St. Augustine wrote, “Our hearts are restless until they rest in you.” Benedict lived that restlessness, which led him to the quiet of his cave in Subiaco.

He organized monastic life around this single purpose. Every aspect of the monastery—and every corner of Sacro Speco—was designed to help people seek God. Last month, I was blessed to recommit myself to that lifelong search while praying in the Holy Cave. The silence there reminded me that silence grounds us in our charism and continually calls us back to God. Nothing was separated from that search.

Many people think holiness belongs only to those who do extraordinary things. Benedict says otherwise. Holiness is found in ordinary faithfulness lived with extraordinary love. Every task can become prayer when it is offered to God.

The Balance of Benedict

Another hallmark of Benedictine spirituality is balance. Benedict understood human nature well. He knew that extremes rarely lead to holiness. More often, holiness is found in faithfully living the ordinary.

His Rule avoids both harshness and laziness. It calls for discipline and compassion, prayer and work, contemplation and action, personal responsibility and community life. This balance is captured in the familiar Benedictine phrase: *ora et labora*—pray and work.

Fifteen centuries later, Benedict’s wisdom remains remarkably relevant. We experienced that on our pilgrimage as we continually adjusted our plans to care for one another. We found balance by supporting each other’s needs. The question for us is: How do we continue living that same wisdom as a community of Oblates?

Community and Mutual Respect

Benedict also teaches us about community. A monastery is not a collection of isolated individuals. It is a family seeking God together.

Community life is not always easy. Living with and loving others means navigating differences, misunderstandings, and frustrations. Benedict knew that well, which is why he emphasized humility, patience, forgiveness, and mutual respect.

One of the most beautiful chapters of the Rule is Chapter 72, often called the chapter on “Good Zeal.” There he writes, “Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ,” especially by recognizing Christ in one another and in the ordinary moments of daily life.

Before that famous line, Benedict describes what Christian community should look like:

- Supporting one another.
- Bearing one another’s weaknesses patiently.
- Seeking one another’s good.
- Showing respect and honor.

These values aren’t meant only for monasteries. They are needed in marriages, families, parishes, workplaces, and society itself. The world often teaches us to ask, “What do I want?” Benedict teaches us to ask, “What serves the common good? What is best for the good of the whole?”

Benedict’s Lasting Legacy

Benedict died around the year 547, yet his influence continues. Thousands of monasteries still follow his Rule. Countless Oblates draw wisdom from his teachings. Millions of Christians have been inspired by his vision of prayer, community, hospitality, and balance.

But Benedict’s greatest legacy is not simply a Rule. It is a way of life centered on Christ. Even the Rule ends by reminding us that it is only a beginning—a guide for those who seek God. Ultimately, Benedict always points beyond himself. He points to Jesus, and everything he taught leads us to Christ.

In honor of the Solemnity of St. Benedict, I invite us to carry three simple practices into our daily lives.

First, **listen with the ear of your heart.** Create moments of silence and make space for God’s voice.

Second, **seek God in the ordinary.** Discover His presence in your daily work, relationships, and responsibilities.

Third, **prefer nothing whatever to Christ.** Let Him become the center around which every aspect of your life revolves.

The world Benedict inhabited was uncertain and troubled, yet he believed that a life rooted in Christ could become a source of peace, stability, and hope. The same is true today.

May we, like Benedict, become people who listen deeply, pray faithfully, welcome generously, serve humbly, and seek God above all things. And may we one day hear the words every disciple longs to hear: “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord.” **St. Benedict, pray for us.**

A Pilgrim’s Journey
Shirley France, Oblate Formation Coordinator



One early morning, I had the thought that it was time to move closer to our son in Boise, Idaho. We had lived in our home in Plain City, Ohio, for thirty years, volunteering in the state prisons, worshiping with our faith community, and sharing life with neighbors, friends, and family.

It was a monumental decision that required a great deal of asking and listening. If this was truly God’s will, I wanted confirmation before taking the next step. So I made a deal with God: if Steph, my husband, suggested moving closer to our son, I would take it as my sign. Several months later, Steph announced that he had a wonderful new idea—we should move to Idaho. Such wisdom!

Neither of us realized what an enormous undertaking that decision would become. We listed our house, enlisted our neighbor—a professional home stager and packer—to help prepare it for sale, and endured weeks of showings, sometimes with only forty-five minutes’ notice. Waiting for the right offer was even harder.

Thomas Merton, the Cistercian monk and mystic, often wrote that a true pilgrimage requires letting go of control and trusting the journey as much as the destination. One of his reflections has stayed with me: “For although God is right with us, and in us and out of us and all through us, we have to go on a journey to find Him.”

Eventually, the right offer came—one that would allow us to make the move and settle our remaining debts. After several trips to Idaho, we found the house that, as our friend Maggie had prayed, seemed to choose us. Steph, our

son, and I knew immediately it was home. We made an offer, and it was accepted.

Moving from a 4,000-square-foot house into an 1,800-square-foot home certainly required letting go. We discovered boxes in the crawl space that had never been unpacked after our move from Kentucky to Ohio thirty years earlier. Closets, drawers, dishes, towels, clothes, artwork, furniture—it felt endless.

As I packed each box, I kept another beside it for Goodwill. I laughed when Steph’s sister, who was moving from Ohio to California, told us she had packed ninety-three boxes. I couldn’t imagine having that many. Our final count was 243.

We gave away furniture, artwork, garden tools, televisions, computers, dishes, and countless other things to friends and neighbors. Even now, after five weeks in Idaho, we continue unpacking a few boxes each day, and another box still heads to Goodwill. Letting go—and then letting go some more—has been surprisingly liberating. For three weeks, Steph wore the same pair of pants to church because we hadn’t yet found the rest of his clothes. He didn’t mind at all.

Now I find myself a pilgrim in what feels like a foreign land. Idaho is dry, with little humidity, and underground sprinklers fed by the Boise River aquifer keep the lawns green. I don’t have friends here yet. We attend the largest Catholic parish in Idaho, just two miles

from our home. Everything feels new. Everything is different. During the summer, when temperatures climb to 100 or even 106 degrees, Steph and I wait until after 9:00 each evening to walk or ride our bikes, when it has “cooled” to about 85 degrees.

So what is this pilgrim learning?

First, Steph and I know how deeply blessed we are to live near our son, who nearly died of cancer three years ago. Every day with him feels like a gift.

We are also learning that if we want friends, we must first be friends. We are learning to be quieter, to listen more than we speak, and to embrace this season rather than rush through it. We trust that we will grow at exactly the pace God intends. For that, we are simply grateful.

In May 1968, Thomas Merton journeyed to the American West, visiting Redwoods Monastery in California and Christ in the Desert Monastery

in New Mexico. At the end of that pilgrimage, he wrote, “What can we gain by sailing to the moon if we are not able to cross the abyss that separates us from ourselves?”

To me, this pilgrimage to Idaho has become that kind of journey. It has been less about changing geography than about discovering myself more deeply and recognizing that God has been present in every step of the journey.

For this pilgrimage, we give thanks to God.

“For although God is right with us, and in us and out of us and all through us, we have to go on a journey to find Him.”



Our Benedictine Pilgrimage

Sister Becky Mathauer, Oblate-Sister Liaison



A pilgrimage is never simply about arriving at a destination. It is about allowing God to transform us along the way. As Benedictines, we know that every journey begins with listening—listening to God’s voice, to one another, and to the movement of the Holy Spirit within our hearts.

Our pilgrimage to Rome in 2026 was far more than a visit to beautiful churches, ancient monasteries, or sacred relics. It became an invitation to rediscover our identity as Benedictines in communion with the universal Church. During these years leading to the 1,500th anniversary

of the founding of Monte Cassino, Benedictines throughout the world have been invited to journey together in hope, listening, and renewal.

Standing in St. Peter’s Basilica, we felt the weight of centuries of faith. Millions of pilgrims have crossed that threshold seeking forgiveness, hope, healing, and purpose. We realized we were simply the newest chapter in God’s continuing story. Faith is never lived alone; it is handed down through generations of disciples who have answered Christ’s invitation to “Come, follow me.”

Yet some of the most profound moments came not in the grandeur of Rome, but in the quiet places. At Sacro Speco in Subiaco—the Holy Cave where St. Benedict lived and wrote his Rule—we renewed our vows of stability, fidelity, and obedience. In the silence of the monastery chapel, during the Eucharist, in shared and private prayer, and while walking ancient streets together, we discovered once again that God often speaks most clearly in stillness. Benedict understood that silence is not emptiness but sacred space where God can enter.

As we prayed in places shaped by Benedictine history, we encountered the enduring wisdom of our Holy Father Benedict. More than fifteen centuries later, his Rule continues to offer a path to peace in a restless world. Stability teaches us to remain faithful when life is difficult. Conversion of life reminds us that each day is a new beginning. Obedience invites us to hear God’s voice in Scripture, in community, and in the ordinary moments of daily life.

The pilgrimage also deepened our appreciation for community. We traveled together, prayed together, laughed together, and occasionally struggled together. In doing so, we experienced one of Benedict’s greatest truths: we encounter God through one another. Every conversation over a meal, every shared prayer, and every helping hand became an expression of the hospitality Benedict asks us to extend by recognizing Christ in every person we meet.

Rome itself became a living classroom of the Church’s memory. The basilicas, catacombs, monasteries, and witness of countless saints reminded us that holiness is never abstract. It is lived by ordinary people who choose faithfulness day after day. Saints Peter and Paul, St. Scholastica, St. Benedict, and generations of monks, nuns, Oblates,

and faithful Christians continue to encourage us on that same journey today.

Perhaps the greatest lesson of any pilgrimage is that every pilgrim eventually returns home. But returning home does not mean leaving the pilgrimage behind. The true pilgrimage begins now. We carry Rome not in photographs or souvenirs, but in hearts that have been changed. The challenge before us is to bring the peace of the monastery into our homes, our workplaces, our parishes, and our communities.

Can we listen more attentively? Can we pray more faithfully? Can we welcome the stranger more generously? Can we seek peace more intentionally? Can we recognize Christ more readily in those around us?

These are the questions our pilgrimage leaves with us.

St. Benedict reminds us, “Prefer nothing whatever to Christ.” Those words become our guide as we return to ordinary life. The stones of Rome remain in Italy, but the living Church continues wherever disciples gather to seek Christ together.

This pilgrimage is not simply a cherished memory but an ongoing

conversion. Every Eucharist recalls the altars where we prayed. Every Liturgy of the Hours echoes the voices of monks and nuns who have prayed these psalms for centuries. Every act of hospitality reflects the generosity we experienced in the Benedictine communities that welcomed us along the way.

Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, I returned home changed. My heart has burned within me as I continue to encounter Christ in prayer, in the Church, in community, and in each of you.

Now the road continues here at home. Together we journey toward Good Zeal and everlasting life with hearts overflowing with hope and joy. The pilgrimage was never the destination—it was the beginning. Day by day we are invited into deeper conversion. Day by day we grow as we reflect on where God has led us and remain open to where He is calling us next, allowing our hearts to be emptied of self and filled with His abiding presence and love.

St. Benedict, walk beside us. St. Scholastica, pray for us. May Christ continue to reveal Himself in the ordinary moments of every day.

REGISTER NOW

Pilgrimage for Creation

Saturday, September 5, 2026

A six-mile pilgrimage from the Sisters of St. Benedict, Ferdinand, to Saint Meinrad Archabbey, St. Meinrad.

Register online at thedome.org/pilgrimage.



Steppingstones Along My Journey

Lynn Belli, Oblate Communication Coordinator

When I reflect on my journey, the image that comes to mind is a path of steppingstones, each one marking a new chapter in my life. The image makes me smile, partly because my balance has never been very good. I can easily picture myself placing one foot on a stone, wobbling slightly on the next, and steadying myself before moving forward again. In many ways, that is what my life has been: a series of careful steps, small adjustments, and moments of regained balance as God continues to lead me forward.

From the time I was a young child, I sensed God calling me toward a life different from what was familiar in my family. I grew up in Allegany, New York, home of the Allegany Franciscans. Their Motherhouse was just a short distance from our home, and I remember seeing the sisters walk by. My siblings and I would run outside to greet them as they passed.

When I was nine years old, that quiet call grew stronger during a stay in the hospital. The nurses who cared for me were Franciscan sisters, and I remember telling my parents that I wanted to be like them—not nurses, but sisters.

That desire eventually led me to Phoenix, Arizona, when I was twenty-one. A friend and I boarded a Greyhound bus for a place I barely knew, trusting that God would reveal the next step. Before long, I realized it was time to explore religious life. A convent stood just down the street from where I lived, and the sisters welcomed me warmly. They invited me to pray, share meals, and spend time with them. Each evening, it became harder to leave because I felt a sense of belonging I couldn’t fully explain.



With the guidance of Sr. Linda Campbell, my spiritual director, I discerned a call to the Benedictine Sisters at Ferdinand. After spending two weeks with the community, I returned home for the summer to be with my parents, brothers, and friends before entering the monastery. Only later did I realize how deeply my decision affected my parents and how much this new path required all of us to adjust.

In September 1984, we packed my parents’ van and drove to Ferdinand. I still remember how warmly the sisters welcomed not only me but my parents as well.

For the next several years, I believed this would be my life forever. Then, on November 11, 1989—my last day as a Benedictine sister—Sr. Kathy Huber, my spiritual director, recalled Abraham Lincoln’s words about his years in Indiana: “Here is where I grew up.” She was speaking about me. The monastery had become the place where I had grown spiritually, emotionally, and personally. Yet I also knew God was calling me to continue my journey along a different path.

Those five years in the monastery shaped me in ways I continue to discover. They taught me that growth often comes through struggle, that community is both gift and challenge, and that holiness is found not only in extraordinary moments of prayer but in the ordinary rhythms of daily life—listening, being patient, and faithfully carrying out simple responsibilities. I will always be grateful for that sacred chapter, where I learned to listen more deeply for God’s voice through St. Benedict’s enduring invitation to “listen with the ear of your heart.”

Living the Benedictine Spirit as an Oblate

Although my vocation led me away from monastic life, it also opened the door to becoming an oblate. That calling has continued to shape me in unexpected ways, stretching my faith and reminding me that the lessons I learned in the monastery still guide my life today.

Recently, I was asked to plan the prayer and liturgy for our oblate retreat. I felt called to pray the Liturgy of the Hours on the same schedule the sisters in Ferdinand would be following that weekend. With Sr. Anita Louise’s help, we prepared morning, midday, and evening prayer, and by God’s grace, I also planned and led the closing Eucharist. While I have been blessed with many gifts, singing is certainly not one of them. Thankfully, with Sr. Kathy Cash leading the music, we celebrated together with joy and reverence.

When I returned home, I told a friend that I had felt completely in my element throughout the retreat. I realized that my years in the monastery had quietly prepared me to lead prayer in the Benedictine tradition long after I had left its walls.



Gratitude Along the Way

I have been deeply blessed by my family, my extended family, and the many people who have walked beside me through the years. Today I happily share my home with my best friend and our three cats. I have also been blessed with opportunities to travel throughout the United States and around the world, most recently to Iceland, a country of breathtaking beauty and gracious people.

“It’s not the destination, it’s the journey.”

Looking back, I can see that God was guiding me long before I recognized His direction. Allegany, Phoenix, Ferdinand, and every place in between became steppingstones on the path He prepared for me. Some brought joy, others uncertainty, but each deepened my faith, strengthened my trust, and revealed God’s enduring love.

Like someone carefully crossing a stream, I have occasionally wobbled along the way. Yet every time, God has steadied my footing, invited me to take the next step, and gently led me forward.

A Reflection about Pilgrimage

Oblate Alice Lundgen

A pilgrimage is very different from a planned journey, where both the destination and the timeline are known. A pilgrimage begins with the deepest longing of the heart. It leads us where we never expected to go, yet something within us keeps calling us forward.

My pilgrimage began with a search and a promise. When I was a child, my aunt gave me a quarter and told me to put it in my bank. “Whatever you do,” she said, “don’t take it outside.” I took it outside.

As I admired it shining in the sunlight, I dropped it. I searched and searched on my hands and knees but couldn’t find it. Finally, I leaned back, looked toward heaven, and prayed. I promised God that if He helped me find that quarter, I would serve Him for the rest of my life. When I opened my eyes, the quarter was lying between my knees.

Forty years later, I found myself on my knees again. This time, I wasn’t in the soft grass of my childhood yard but on the concrete floor of a prison cell, begging God for forgiveness and guidance. As He always does, God provided exactly what I needed when I needed it.

Someone offered me a copy of Monastery of the Heart. I couldn’t put it down. I read it, then read it again, sensing it was both an answer to my prayer and the beginning of something much bigger.

I shared my experience with the prison chaplain, who happened to be a Benedictine oblate. She nourished my soul and introduced me to other Benedictine resources. Around the same time, I met an outside volunteer who was also studying to become an oblate.

Every chance I had, I asked what she was learning. I felt like a starving child, eager for every morsel. It wasn’t my body that hungered—it was my soul.

She shared my enthusiasm with her spiritual director, who generously offered to guide me. Imagine that: a former prioress boarding a bus and traveling many miles just to come behind razor wire and electric fences to accompany me on my journey.

After eighteen months of prayer, study, soul-searching, countless written lessons mailed to Ferdinand, and many visits with my spiritual guide, I stood before my community and made my oblation. I promised to dedicate myself to the service of God and humankind according to the Rule of St. Benedict, as my state in life permits. The pilgrimage continues.

There are countless opportunities to serve humankind in a place many see only as home to society’s castaways. But I have come to know a deeper truth: we are all God’s children. Each day, I try to greet and welcome every person as though they were Christ.



Retreat in New Harmony

Our oblate retreat was held in New Harmony, IN, from June 5 to 7, 2026. The theme was **Living Benedictine: Am I the Benedict the World Needs Now?**

Wisdom shared, wisdom learned, not only from the presenters, but through one another. Let us continue to pray for one another, to be open to what the spirit is calling us to do. In the spirit of Saints Benedict and Scholastica.



An Oblate Prayer

O loving God,
We ask your blessing on all the Oblates of Saint Benedict,
on those with whom we are affiliated,
and all Benedictines throughout the world.
Help us to become people of prayer and peace.
Though scattered far and wide,
help us to be together in the spirit of your love.
Give us hearts wide enough to embrace each other
as well as those whose lives we touch.

Enable us to listen and to learn from each other
and from those around us each day.
May we be models in our homes,
neighborhoods and communities
of wise stewardship, dignified human labor,
sacred leisure and reverence for all living things.
Above all, O God, may our presence among others
be a constant witness of justice, compassion and hope to all.
Amen.

A special thank you to Sr. Anita Louise Lowe, Stephanie Smith, Shirley France, Sr. Becky Mathauer, Lynn Belli, and our guest writer, Alice Lundgren, for their beautiful reflections. Photo credits to Emily Earhart and Lynn Belli.