

April 2012



Sister Donna Marie Herr moves a box of frozen food at the St. Vincent de Paul Food Pantry, where she serves as coordinator.

“..offer something to God of your own will with the joy of the Holy Spirit ... look forward to Easter with joy and spiritual longing.”

—Rule of St. Benedict
Chapter 49, vs. 6–7

Psalms of Lament

By Sister Donna Marie Herr

The psalms of lament help us deal with the reality that life is not always easy — and just wishing it were all “joy” will not make it so! The fact that over one-third of the psalms are categorized as lament psalms speaks to their importance for our lives. The term “lament” as used in scripture might be defined as “a strong expression of sorrow, regret, or complaint to God in prayer or song, either individual or communal.”

Using Walter Brueggemann’s framework of psalms as three seasons of life (Orientation, Disorientation, Re-Orientation — already described in Sister Mary Ann’s and Sister Louise’s presentations), the lament psalms fit primarily in the disorientation season. Tragedy strikes or some crisis thrusts us into panic, fear, discouragement, alienation or a feeling of great loss. We are “in the pits!” It feels like the end of the world!

The psalms of lament give voice to what is going on within us. These psalms give words to our anger or resentment. They often use abrasive or exaggerated language because the feeling is so deep! Praying lament psalms can help us face the darkness in our lives because there is someone to whom we can bring our pain. God promised to be with us always. This foundational trust in God helps us move from anguish to hope! When we refuse to lament we are hiding part of our inner selves from God thereby blocking a deeper relationship with God.



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Four types of lament psalms:

1) Community laments – (Ex. Ps. 10, 44, 74, 79, 106, 137)

A group faces a great difficulty (natural disaster, oppression, an attack by an “enemy”); they approach God together expressing their sorrow or distress and ask for God’s intervention. (For the people of Israel – there was a lot of public energy focused on the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Babylonians, 587 B.C. — the loss of their very center!)

2) Individual laments – (Ex. Ps. 3, 13, 22, 31, 54, 56, 120)

Something is terribly wrong in a person’s life: sickness, rejection, mistreatment, or some great loss. From an individual’s anguish comes a prayer for help — trusting God enough to cry out to God!

3) Penitential psalms – (Ex. Ps. 6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143)

A person acknowledges their own sinfulness; they are guilty and hurting inside. The “enemy” is themselves. The person’s need for God’s loving mercy is expressed along with trust in God’s ability to restore a sense of peace and well-being.

4) Imprecatory psalms – (Ex. Ps. 35, 58, 59, 69, 70, 109, 137, 140)

These “curse psalms” can be troubling because they express a desire for vengeance towards an “enemy” who has deeply hurt an individual or nation.

To pray these psalms meaningfully, it might be helpful to see the basic structure of the psalms of lament.

Basic structure:

1) Address to God — introductory cry for help. These are personal words, not spoken by a stranger, but by one who has a history of trusting God. For example, “Why do you, O Lord...?” (not “I wonder why you..”)

2) The complaint. The psalmist tells God how bad things are, perhaps in the language of exaggeration, to get

God’s attention. The hope is to get a favorable response from God who has the power to remedy the situation.

3) Confession of trust in God. Frequently these lines are found: “O Lord, you will hear...I trust in You.”

4) Petitioning God. The psalmist tells God what is needed — pleading with God for justice and mercy — in phrases like: “Rise up, O Lord! ...Do not forget...”

5) Reasons given to God for answering the prayer: the speaker is innocent and entitled to help; the speaker is guilty and in need of God’s mercy; the speaker recalls God’s help in the past, trusting that God can act again; God’s reputation is at stake --“for thy name’s sake.”

6) Acknowledgment of response. A change happens. Most often the psalm does not reveal what has transpired to bring about the change but God did act in some way!

7) Praise. When one has been “in the pits” but gets out the natural response is thanksgiving and praise! God is acknowledged as good, generous, and faithful even while the person still remembers what it was like “in the depths.”



Being familiar with the structure of the psalms of lament can give new meaning to the psalms of praise. Lament often precedes praise. Michael Jinkins says, “We can praise God only when we are willing to trust him with our lamentations.” There may well be more pain down the road, but we know from experience that God will always be there!

Lament psalms are necessary for a number of reasons. First, they are models of prayer. When we express our laments to God, we are joined to our ancestors in the faith and to God’s people through the ages who have expressed their anguish to a compassionate God and who trusted in God’s faithfulness! Prayer is powerful! God always hears the pleas of God’s people.

Second, the lament psalms can help us deal with grief. Sooner or later, we will “find ourselves in these psalms” when something difficult comes our way: a rejection, a job loss, loss of a loved one, a broken

relationship, a devastating medical diagnosis, a harmed reputation, or a feeling of abandonment by God. Healing can come only if we deal with the pain. As human beings we need to lament when our loss is deep. Expressing our pain — putting it in words — helps us “give it over” to God and opens a path to healing. When we pray a lament psalm in our sorrow we might say, “I have these feelings myself. I see that other people brought these feelings to prayer. This is my prayer too!” It is consoling to realize that, in the midst of deep sorrow, a “broken heart” is normal. These psalms help us realize that there have been a long line of grieving people before us. We need not feel so “alone” in our grief. Perhaps writing one’s own lament psalms, as Ann Weems did in her book, *Modern Psalms of Lament*, (after the tragic death of her 21-year-old son), might help the process of grief to unfold.

Third, the lament psalms can help one become a more contemplative person. The honest and open talking to God about how we “really are” deepens our relationship with God!

What about the Vengeance (imprecatory) psalms? Should we even be using them? These psalms are basically asking God to “get even with them!” (Ps. 58:7 – “O God, smash their teeth in their mouths...”) Some say we shouldn’t feel



You are invited to be in touch with the Sisters of St. Benedict in prayer. Use the following link:

<mms://smtp.thedome.org/churchcam>

that way — but sometimes we do feel that way! We could deny the feeling but it might get acted out in an unhealthy way. These psalms allow us to give the feelings “over to God” so that healing can begin. Just because we ask God to “break someone’s teeth” doesn’t mean God will do it or that God will punish us for feeling that way. God will handle the situation in God’s way.

If we ourselves don’t feel angry or vengeful, should we still pray these psalms? We might ask ourselves — Is there someone who has been treated unjustly, or experienced the horrors of war, or who are victims of sexual abuse who might need to pray this way today? Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor, says that abuse, torture and terror “drive speech to silence.” Words don’t come! For many Holocaust survivors it was easier to suppress the memory of their horrible experiences than to speak out the pain -- but

these remained stuck in their pain, never able to come to any forgiveness. We can submit their pain to God and pray for new life to emerge. We can be a voice for them. Praying these psalms can be a general outcry against violence, oppression and injustice in our society and our world.

The psalms help us talk to God – from the depth of pain (lament psalms) to the heights of joy (thanksgiving, praise psalms) – and remind us that God is faithful and compassionate! Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “Whoever has begun to pray the Psalter earnestly and regularly, will soon give leave to those other easy, little prayers of their own because they lack the power, passion and fire to be found in the Psalter.” Certainly the Lament psalms are filled with “power, passion and fire!”



Oblates is published four times a year by the Oblate Leadership Team: Sisters Kathy Bilskie, Mary Victor Kercher, and Barbara Ann Offerman.

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Monastery Moments and Oblate Offerings

Oblate Birthdays

April 21

Renewal of Monastic Profession

Three sisters will renew their Monastic Profession. This celebration is for members of the religious community only.

May 19

Volunteer Appreciation Day The religious community will honor volunteer workers who have assisted the sisters during the past year.

May 20

Oblate Meeting Join Sister Mary Victor Kercher as she presents the "Wisdom Psalms." This presentation will be the last in the 2011-12 series featuring the psalms. Registration is required to attend Mass, dinner, and/or the meeting.

June 11-13

Camp Marian Girls in 5th through 8th grades join sisters and other camp counselors for days of learning and fun.

June 22-28

Come & See Week Young women join the religious community for prayer, work, and fun as they explore the deeper possibilities of a religious vocation.

June 24

Academy Alumnae Reunion The sisters joyfully welcome Academy alumnae to a day of celebration.

July 7

Summer Social Mark your calendar for the 2012 summer social. Volunteers needed to prepare for the social and to help on social day. Additional information is available on page 7 in this newsletter.

July 20-26

Community Retreat All religious community members will participate in a retreat during this week.

August 4

Golden Jubilee Celebration Four sisters will celebrate their Jubilee: Sisters Mary Louise Uebelhor, Christine Marie Fendel, Norma Fultz, and Patricia Ann McGuire.



Sister Mary Louise



Sister Christine Marie



Sister Norma



Sister Patricia Ann

May

6 — Linda Doyle,
7 — Rita Langer,
Barbara Poitra;
8 — Mary Eileen
Fritz, 10 — Phyllis
Claycamp, Debbi
Vickers; 20 —
Sharon Kilpatrick;
23 — Bridget
Tierney; 27 — Julie Beck; 28 — Linda
Begle, 31 — Gail Trotter



June

7 — James Werner; 8 — Marlis Mahrer;
12 — Karen Rexing; 15 — Bernadette
Heeke, Phyllis Jollie; 20 — Dayna
Barlow, Joseph Marion; 21 — Theresa
Bauer, Anne Howerton; 24 — Brenda
DeMotte; 30 — Marilyn Becker

July

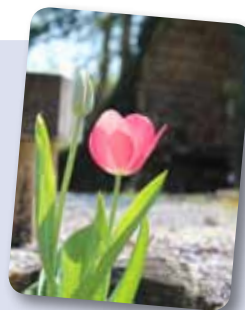
4 — Elaine Baumgart; 7 — Mary Lou
Bassler, Mary Taber; 9 — Chihoko
Wake; 11 — Martha Schmitt; 12
— Zella Kueneman; 13 — Charles
Luebbehusen; 17 — Mary Lamberg;
20 — Ed Brown, Sandy Turner; 30 —
Judith Kissel, Carolyn Werner

A Marian Hymn for Easter time

Sung daily by the Sisters at the end of Evening Prayer

O Queen of heaven, be joyful, alleluia
For Christ, the Son you were chosen to bear, alleluia
Has arisen as He foretold, alleluia,
Pray God, to aid your children, alleluia.

Rejoice and be glad O Virgin Mary, alleluia
Because our Lord is truly risen, alleluia. Let us Pray.
O God, you have given joy to the world by the resurrection of your Son, our
Lord Jesus Christ.
Through the prayers of His Mother, the Virgin Mary, bring us to the
happiness of eternal life. Through Christ our Lord.



Pray for the deceased relatives of Sisters and Oblates:

Oblate Lucile Vinson
Oblate Norma Lennartz
Mary Agnes Olinger,
mother-in-law of Oblate Sandy Turner

Alberta Begle,
sister of Sister Beata Mehling

Edna Davis,
sister-in-law of Sister Wilma Davis

Federation of St. Gertrude

By Sister Joella Kidwell

For the Federation of St. Gertrude and its member monasteries, 2012 will mark an important anniversary. Seventy-five years ago, April 25, 1937, the Federation of St. Gertrude was approved by the Holy See. You may wonder, "What is a federation?" and "Why is its founding an important event in the history of Benedictine women?"

Our documents tell us that "The Federation of St. Gertrude is a monastic congregation according to universal (church) law. It consists of autonomous monasteries of American Benedictine sisters who profess stability, fidelity to the monastic way of life and obedience according to the Rule of Benedict and The General Norms and The Specific Norms of the Federation of St. Gertrude." The General Norms and The Specific Norms are what we call the constitutions of the institute and outline how the monasteries are to live out the Rule of St. Benedict in today's world. The Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand joined the Federation in 1939, just two years after its founding.

Why was it necessary to establish a Federation? To answer this question, we have to revisit the early history of Benedictine women in the United States. In 1852 an early foundation was made in St. Mary's, Pennsylvania, by a small group of sisters sent from St. Walburg Monastery in Bavaria to live among and work with the German immigrants. From their arrival in New York (the priest who recruited them forgot when they were coming and so there was no one to meet them and assist them in their journey to St. Mary's, Pennsylvania) the story of this new foundation in the United States is one of terrible hardship and poverty for these women. They quickly discovered that they could not live the monastic life in the same way that it was lived in Europe. They adapted and began immediately to minister to the needs of the German-speaking settlers, founding many schools and later, hospitals. While the abject poverty in which they lived and the harsh winters of Pennsylvania made life difficult, these challenges were minor in relation to the structures that ruled their lives. They had



Those attending the 2011 Chapter of the Federation of St. Gertrude gathered Sunday morning on the monastery steps for an "official" photo.

very little control over their own lives and were often at the mercy of the local bishop, who had little understanding of monastic life. Yet it was he who appointed superiors, controlled their assets, determined which candidates would be accepted, insisted on the type of works that they would undertake irrespective of talent, training and/or interest. The local Bishop also served as "visitor" – the person responsible for evaluating the quality of monastic life being lived in the monasteries. This system not only caused much stress in the lives of the sisters, but also was the source of unnecessary misunderstanding and conflict among the people and church leaders of the time. In spite of the many hardships, by the early 1900's there were a large number of houses of Benedictine women scattered throughout the United States.

It was obvious that these women needed to be able to have control over their own lives and find ways to support one another. Because of the great distances between monasteries, they were often very isolated and lacked structures (sometimes were forbidden by the local bishop) to come together for dialogue and spiritual enrichment in their unique vocation. For this reason and more likely other not so obvious reasons, "the Sacred

Consistorial Congregation (headed by His Holiness, the Pope) resolved that the Benedictine Sisters (of the U.S.A.), so far under the jurisdiction of local Bishops, should be invited to establish themselves into unions or Congregations over which the Holy See would have direct jurisdiction." The Congregation of St. Scholastica was the first such union that was formed. Because of the wording of their early Constitutions, not all of the monasteries in the U.S. were eligible to join that Federation (The wording in their document did not allow for sisters involved in a health care ministry.) Consequently, in January 1920 the process of founding another Congregation, called the Congregation of St. Gertrude, was begun. The process took 17 years. (The Congregation of St. Gertrude became the Federation of St. Gertrude at the time of the promulgation of the 1984 Code of Canon Law.)

Presently there are four Federations/ Congregations of monastic women in the United States: Federation of St. Scholastica (23 monasteries); Federation of St. Gertrude (15 monasteries); Federation of St. Benedict (10 monasteries); Congregation of Perpetual Adoration (3 monasteries).

Each of these Federations/

Congregations is governed by a Chapter. The Federation Chapter for the Federation of St. Gertrude meets every 3 years. A Federation Chapter is made up of three representatives from each of the member monasteries, the Federation President and five Federation Council members. The Chapter has the power to amend/update The Specific Norms as the need arises. (The Chapter can also amend The General Norm, but changes to these norms require approval from Rome.) Each monastery also develops a set of Monastery Norms that says how the law is lived out in that particular monastery. For example in the Federation of St. Gertrude, The General Norms legislate that the term of a Prioress may not exceed 12 years. The Monastic Norms of most monasteries further limit the length of the term, as for example, the prioress is elected for a term of 4 years with a possibility of a

re-election for another 4 years, or she may be elected for only one term of 6 years. As long as the term does not exceed 12 years, each monastery is free to determine the length of term that will work best in their circumstances. Currently the term for the prioress of the Ferdinand community is 5 years with a possible re-election for a second term of 5 years. The length of term of prioress can be changed by a vote of the Chapter (all perpetually professed members) of the particular monastery.

The Federation Chapter also elects a president and a Federation Council. "The authority of the Federation is vested in the Federation Chapter when it is in session and in the Federation President assisted by the Federation Council between sessions of the Chapter..." So authority once vested in the local Bishop is now vested in the Federation structure. The Ferdinand monastery has had three women serve as Federation President: Mother Clarissa

Reihl, Sister Kathryn Huber, and the current president, Sister Joella Kidwell. A number of Ferdinand Benedictines have served on the Federation Council over the years: Sister Jane Becker, Sister Carlita Koch, Sister Judy Yunker (now a member of Dwelling Place Monastery) and Sister Kathryn Huber. This past summer the Ferdinand monastery hosted the 24th Federation Chapter. The next Federation Chapter will take place in 2014 at the Monastery of St. Gertrude in Cottonwood, Idaho.

In 1993, *Women Gathering, The Story of the Benedictine Federation* of St. Gertrude, written by Sister Jane Klimish, OSB, of Yankton, South Dakota, was published. This very readable history is available through the Federation office. For information on the individual monasteries in the Federation, please visit the Federation web page at www.federationofstgertrude.org.

Getting To Know the Oblates

Theresa Bauer

The Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand have been part of my life since almost before I was born. My dad had Sister Innocentia as a teacher and spoke of her occasionally. As a young child, I remember the family going to Ferdinand for the summer socials. My grade school teachers came from Ferdinand until Our Lady of Grace in Indianapolis started providing them. When it was time for high school, Dad was determined that we five kids should continue in a Catholic education, so I was packed off to the Academy Immaculate Conception — still the best and most fun four years I have had to date! I think every single day I have some occasion to be thankful for that priceless education along with the moral and spiritual guidance of the sisters. Many times throughout the years, I have been told by various people that I speak like an "educated" person. The Academy always gets all the credit!

Somewhere along the line in my thirties, I felt an unease with how my spiritual life was going. I wasn't sure what it was, couldn't put my finger on it, but for about 25 years I drifted along becoming more cynical and depressed about the whole thing. Yes, I was in church on an organ bench doing music every single week for all of those years. Making church music was my method of worship, but I needed something deeper.

Fortunately, I have kept my contact with the sisters at Ferdinand all my life. One day on a visit, Sister Mary Claude

just came out and said, "So why don't you join the Oblates?" I had been in the Oblates in high school, but it was probably more of a social thing at that time — we got to have dinner at St. Meinrad! After two years of thinking about that, I finally took the plunge and it has turned my life back around. The Rule puts it down in plain language — there is a path to follow by way of prayer, study, work, and seeing God everywhere and in everyone. And I have Oblate sisters and brothers along on the journey, not to mention an entire monastery of sisters at my back.

This was so monumental to me that I quickly started a Benedictine spirituality group in my home parish, St. Joseph in Corydon, where I am currently employed as Director of Liturgy and Music. What I was learning from the Rule and Oblate meetings was too good to keep to myself! Together, our group has opened new avenues of spirituality that were sorely missing for the people who needed a very open-minded way to God.

And, lastly, becoming an Oblate of the Monastery Immaculate Conception at Ferdinand has finally made me an official member of "my monastery."



Interested in helping at July 7 Summer Social?

Every five years, we throw one big Summer Social to celebrate another five years of our long-running presence in the area. We're at 145 years and counting.

And the proceeds go to a most worthwhile cause – the care of our senior sisters, who dedicated so much of their lives to serving people in all walks of life.

Such a celebration takes a lot of volunteer help. Visitors come from far and wide to eat great food, play fun games, and win great prizes. With over 35 booths of games of chance and skill, and activities for children, and food galore (including chicken dinners, hamburgers, BBQ, walking tacos, and pork chops), a lot of help is needed.

While the sisters will be very involved in making the Summer Social run on

Saturday, July 7, we could also use some help from other volunteers, such as Oblates.

If you are interested in signing up, please email social@thedome.org or call 812-367-1411, ext. 2829. The operator can also take your information. Please indicate in what type of area you would like to work, i.e., inside, outside, in a specific booth, with parking, etc. Also, please include your full name, phone number, and email address.

We appreciate your help!

This sisters' Summer Social is rapidly approaching. We, as Oblates, are being asked to help contribute to this huge event by making a contribution to the Themed Basket stand. This can be done in a couple of ways. A group of Oblates can pool resources and create a basket together or gift donations may be made to the sisters. These individual items will then be made into a basket or several baskets. If Oblates choose to create their own basket, the items in the basket should be valued between \$80 and \$100.

Baskets and other items should be dropped off at the monastery by Thursday, May 31. Should you have any questions, please contact Sister Jolinda Naas at 812-367-1411.

Volunteers are also needed to help at the stand on Saturday, July 7, 2012.

Where will we meet Jesus

(Thoughts of Father Brendan Moss, OSB, Easter Sunday morning.)

The solemn Alleluia sung... the Exultet proclaimed... the incense burned... and here we stand together in the wee hours of the morning at an empty tomb. Like his Mother, Mary, and Salome we too are amazed. Our amazement, though, is often not at the empty tomb but at the splendor of the Liturgy, the beauty of the music, and the joy found in the multitude of Alleluias that wash over us in the rolling wave that is the Resurrection.

We are amazed at a love so large — so beyond measure — that it would lay down its life for us! We are amazed that this Jesus who cured the lame, opened the eyes of the blind, and gave voice to the woman at the well has become the ransom for our souls and given us life... life that we may have it abundantly!

But our amazement... like that of his

mother, Mary, and Salome at the tomb — can only be a momentary experience. As the angel wrapped in white instructed those women, so we are instructed to go and meet Jesus where he told us he would be. No. We will not travel to Galilee for that is not where he told us he would be. US! He told us to meet him in the sick, the hungry, the poor, and the marginalized. We are to meet him in the immigrants of our day, the monastic heroes found in our seniors and in the infirmary. We are to meet him in the parishes, the schools, and the hospitals; wherever we serve. We are to meet him in the sisters we like, the sisters we tolerate, and the sisters we just

don't get. We are to meet him on the street, in the store, and at work. We are to meet him at all times, in every place!

So, for a few moments feel the amazement, bask in a wave of Alleluias, then go and meet Jesus where he told us he would be!

For the reader: What does the Rule of St. Benedict tell us about seeing and finding Christ in life?



SISTERS
OF ST. BENEDICT
FERDINAND, INDIANA

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Seek. Pray. Share.

Oblates

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Special Oblate Events — Summer 2012



Benedictine Study Days at St. Meinrad Archabbey

June 11-14, 2012

Topic: The Sacraments: Means of Grace, Ways of Life.

Presenter: Father Prior Kurt Stasiak, OSB, Monk of St. Meinrad

We know the definition. What does it mean?

Cost: \$300 per person, \$450 per couple.

For more information call Archabbey Guest House at
(800) 581-66905

5th Annual Monastic Institute for Benedictine Oblates

Conversing with Benedict about Modern Values

Are there aspects of modern culture that conflict with monastic thinking?

Can the Rule shed some light on some of the worrisome tendencies of our world?

July 12-15, 2012

Sophia Center – Mount St. Scholastica, Atchison, Kansas

Presenter: Terrence Kardong, OSB

Registration due July 1, 2012. Total program \$300.

Limited to 50 participants.

For more information contact

Sister Micaela Randolph, OSB

913-360-6160 • micaela@mountosb.org