

October 2011



Sister Mary Ann Verkamp presents an overview of the psalms during the September Oblate meeting.

An Overview of the Psalms

By Sister Mary Ann Verkamp

Synopsis of the Presentation to the Oblates – September 25, 2011

1. Meaning of word “psalm”

The Greek word “psalmos” comes from the Hebrew word “zamar” = to pluck; it implies that the psalms were originally composed to be accompanied by stringed instruments.

In the New Testament we are told in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 5,19 “... in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, sing and make melody in your heart to the Lord.” It seems to mean that we are to “pluck the strings of our heart” as we sing. In other words, to sing with emotion. The psalms express ALL the emotions.

2. Origin of Psalms

The Psalms emerged from Israel’s public worship. They were NOT first written and then sung; rather it was probably the other way around. The Psalms are the result of an experience, not an idea. They are meant to bring us into the now experience of God.

The Psalter is not just a collection of prayers but a lesson in how to pray. It is an illustration of the many motifs, aspirations, fears and hopes that are part of any faith community. A full spectrum of the human condition is covered in these prayers. Take ALL the Psalms as they are – don’t drop “cursing psalms” – they reflect the intensity of their prayer.

Continued on page 2.

*“Devote yourself
often to prayer.”*

—Rule of St. Benedict, Ch. 4 v. 56

*“In the presence of
the angels I sing
(pray) to You....
consider then, how we
ought to sing (pray)
the psalms so that
our minds are in
harmony
with our voices.”*

—Rule of St. Benedict, Ch. 19



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The Psalmists knew themselves as sinful persons. So there is no room for hypocrisy on the part of the one who reads and prays these psalms. Psalms are not an outlet for pious thoughts but, rather an honest dialogue with God.

3. Characteristics of Hebrew poetry

The Psalms are poetry with distinct characteristics that include:

Parallelism

The first line is reinforced in the second line (synonymous)
e.g. Ps. 103 “God does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.”

The second line seems to carry forward the thought found in the first phrase in some way.

e.g. Ps. 103 “Bless the Lord, O my soul and all my being, bless God’s holy name.”

Another form of parallelism (opposites) – the idea in the first line is contrasted or negated in the second line as a means of reinforcing it.

e.g. Ps. 37 “The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously.”

Imagery

Another common characteristic, comparing one thing to another.

Think about the images in Psalm 23 (Good Shepherd). In prose we might say with some accuracy: God meets all our needs and protects us. It is true but not exactly memorable. The power and beauty of Ps. 23 is the way that it communicates these ideas through images: shepherd/sheep, green pastures/still waters, the valley of death, a table, an anointing; and an overflowing cup.

There are 2 kinds of images:

simile = a comparison which is made explicit by the presence of the word “like” or “as.” e.g. As the deer longs for streams of water so my soul longs for you. (Ps. 42)

metaphor = a comparison that is implicit, that is a comparison without the mention of like or as. e.g. The Lord is my shepherd. (Ps. 23)

Be aware of the images with the Psalms. We are reading a language of relationships. There are two kinds of language: information = words say exactly what they mean. Relationship = psalmist who calls the Lord “my shepherd” wants to enter into a relationship with God.

Questions — do you prefer questions or answers in life?

There are 125+ questions in the Psalms. Questions are to reposition us; make us aware of our biases, challenge our image of God or the world or present new creative possibilities. Easy answers, instead of hard questions, allow us to try to change others instead of allowing God to change us. Questions prevent us from living life on the surface.

4. Translations

There is always something lost in a translation. Listed below are a few translations of the same phrase in Psalm 27.

- The Lord is my light and my help, whom shall I fear? The Lord is the **stronghold** of my life before whom shall I *shrink*?
- You are my light and my hope, whom should I fear? You are the **strength** of my life before whom should I *tremble*?
- You, Lord, are the light that keeps me safe. I am not afraid of anyone. You **protect me**, and I have no *fears*.

Martin Luther: “Psalms can be difficult to understand or comprehend. But once their shell is cracked through study and reading (*Lectio*), a sweet kernel is found within, one that deeply nourishes spiritual progress.” Using different translations may help in cracking the shell of a Psalm.

5. Types of Psalms/Categories

There have been various attempts to classify the Psalms. Biblical scholars do not agree. The presentations that will be given by other sisters this year will look at some of these categories: Praise, Lament, Thanksgiving, Royal and Wisdom.

My favorite classification of the Psalms is the work of Walter Brueggeman, a Biblical scholar and ordained minister in the United Church of Christ. “Our faith journey,” he says, consists of:

- being securely **ORIENTED** (all is calm, tranquil, peaceful, serene, well settled, reaffirm tradition) = Praise
- being painfully **DISORIENTED** (things not working out, chaos, confusion, fragmented, overwhelmed, darkness) = Lament (majority of Psalms)
- being surprisingly **REORIENTED** (new, not same as old status quo, transformation, new faith level) = Thanksgiving



The Book of Psalms is NOT for those whose life is one of uninterrupted continuity with everything always running smoothly.

6. Authorship of the Psalms:

David* is commonly thought to be the author of the book of Psalms but he actually wrote only about half of them. Asaph, the music director during the reigns of David and Solomon, wrote 12. The Sons of Korah (Korahites), Levite singers and musicians of the temple choir wrote 12. Ethan, founder of one of the temple choirs, wrote four. Solomon, the 3rd King of Israel, wrote two. Heman, another founder of a temple choir, wrote one. Moses, the leader during the Exodus, wrote the earliest psalm (Ps.90). Approximately 45 Psalms are anonymous.

**Ascriptions at beginning of Psalm, e.g. "of David" could mean by David or dedicated to David.*

7. Date of Psalms

It is likely that the Psalms were composed during a 600 year period between about 1000 and 400 BC. If we include Moses, add another 400 yrs. (He lived around 1400BC).

8. Numbering of the Psalms

If one compares different editions of the Bible, one comes up against a confusing set of differences in terms of numeration of the Psalms — Hebrew or Greek numbering. Only the first eight Psalms are the same for both sets. Since Vatican II, Catholics generally use the Hebrew numbering.

9. Structure of the Psalter

The Psalter received its present form only after many generations. The process of collecting Psalms was very gradual — hundreds of years. The final stage divided Psalter into 5 Books:

- Book 1: Ps.1-41
- Book 2: 42-72
- Book 3: 73-89
- Book 4: 90-106
- Book 5: 107-150

Psalms 1 & 150 are like bookends to the Psalter. Ps.1 opens with a meditation of God's law, "Happy the one who follows the law of the Lord — heart expands — leads to praise." (Ps.150)

Sister Kathleen Marie Cash and Sister Jill Marie Reuber made their perpetual monastic profession as members of the Sisters of St. Benedict of Ferdinand, Indiana, on Saturday, October 1, at Monastery Immaculate Conception Church in Ferdinand.

Bishop Charles C. Thompson, of the Diocese of Evansville, presided at the Mass, and Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, prioress, gave the reflection.

10. Psalms and Jesus

Echoes of the Psalms are heard frequently in New Testament passages and on the lips of Jesus. Psalms, like the rest of the Old Testament, point to Jesus. Words of the Psalms on the lips of Jesus take on a new fullness of meaning.

There are many references to the Psalms in the Rule of St. Benedict.

11. Closing story

There is a story told about a small Christian community. This community could be set anywhere in the world, and it gathered together ordinary people, like you and me, who wanted simply to share their faith together. As the story goes, it was their custom to assemble in the evening once a month and to invite the members simply to pray in silence together for a time. After a period of silence, anyone in the group was invited to share a comment, a prayer, or a petition. On one particular evening there was a guest in their midst, a great Shakespearian actor. During the evening he arose and asked to share a prayer. In his refined and stentorian voice he prayed from memory Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd..." When he had finished, the power and dramatic character of his prayer moved the assembly to spontaneous and enthusiastic applause. Somewhat embarrassed, the actor sat down, and the meeting continued. Just as they were about to conclude, one of the oldest members, a widow stooped and frail, stood to offer a prayer. She, too, prayed from memory Ps.23: "The Lord is my shepherd," she prayed, "I shall not want..." So moving were her words that this time the assembly remained in riveted silence as the woman took her seat. After a few awkward moments, someone found the courage to ask: "What has happened here? Why is it that we applauded after the actor prayed that same psalm and now we can only respond in silence to the woman's prayer?" Again there was silence, and then the actor replied, "I think I know the answer. As this woman spoke, we all suddenly realized that, yes, I knew the psalm, but she knows the Shepherd."

May we all come to know the Shepherd better through the Psalms this year.



Keep in touch with God

By Sister Mary Victor Kercher, OSB

Keep in touch! How often we use that phrase as we end a visit, a conversation with a friend, or at the end of a letter, or in the use of one of several technology devices available. Keeping in touch is a simple way of letting a particular person know that the relationship is important, that you care enough to keep the relationship alive. Keep in touch! When am I in touch with family and friends? How often? Why? When is it possible to be in touch with God? How often? Keep in touch with God? A very simple way to be in touch with God? Simply, prayer is keeping in touch with God.

In the Old Testament scriptures, the Book of Ecclesiastes (Chap. 3) we find a passage telling us "...there is a time for every season, a time for every matter under heaven..." It does not mention a time to work and a time to pray. It does not say a time to rest. Rest is recommended in the book of Genesis, chapter 2, "God finished the work he had been doing, he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had been doing. He made the day holy because on it he rested from the work he had done in creation." Prayer? Just considering the Book of Psalms there are 150 examples.

Why be in touch with God? Why not? God is the source of all that is good. We are the work of God's hands. He gives us life. He may test us at times yet God is always ready and pleased when we ask for help. Nothing happens to us without his knowledge. God knows all about our hopes and dreams. Why not be in touch with God? How often to be in touch with God? We do not have to wait in line. God is ready any time, in any situation, in any place where you may want or need to be in touch with God.

When can we be in touch with God?

In morning, noon and night, sunshine and rain, happy times, in pain, in sorrow, making important decisions. There is no time, no occasion, no experience that would be inconvenient to be in touch with God. "In God we live, and move and have our being." (Acts. 17:28)

St. Benedict offers in his Rule a down-to-earth way to be in touch with God in a regular daily and lifetime practice. A favorite Benedictine phrase or motto is Pray and Work. In work let's include study, reading, daily jobs, and resting. The challenge is to make the praying and working one. In the beginning paragraphs of the Rule, Benedict says, "First of all, every time you begin a good work, you must pray to God most earnestly to bring it to perfection. In His goodness, God has already counted us as His own and so we should never grieve Him by our evil deeds. With the good gifts God has given us we must obey Him at all times." (RB Prol 4-6). Begin a good work and pray earnestly that it be for good.

The way of life that Benedict presents is a life that is grounded and lived in the presence of God, to strive to be aware that God is the beginning and the end of all that makes up one's life. God is present in all, in everyone, in each event. God is there in the office, in the plant, in the garden, in the market place, in cleaning, in the laundry, preparing meals or washing dishes. We may not always recognize him, but that does not change the reality of his presence. God is there.

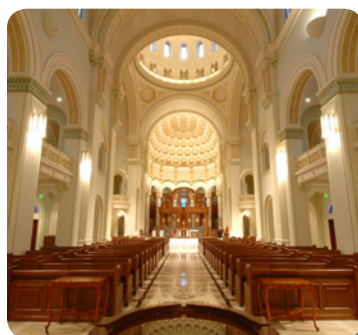
Each task can be a prayer.

Being in touch is a combination of listening and conversation, and doing. Just as we like to share our stories with God, it is polite and proper that we be silent and listen to his words and know his plans for us. Jesus spent many hours telling the people stories, explaining his message, often experiencing opposition, even death. That was not the end of his story. The end was the beginning of Resurrected Life. Being in touch with God requires that we listen, not just hear, but "listen with the ear of our heart." (RB Prol. 1) St. James advises us, "Act on the word. If all you do is listen you are deceiving yourselves." (St. James 1:22-25).

Prayer is simply being in touch with God. Our lives are a mixture of prayer and work. A thoughtful prayerful moment of putting whatever task we may be about in the care of God, Jesus, Mary, even your favorite saint, is all it takes to be in touch with God. Pray and work become one.

Let us be reminded that Jesus prays for us! It is a wonderful thought. Read in John's Gospel, Chapter 17 vs 20-21. In the prayer that Jesus is saying over the apostles he adds, "I do not pray for them (apostles) alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word that all may be one..." Jesus prays and works for us!

Prayer is simply being in touch with God and God in touch with us.



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

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

Monastery Moments and Oblate Offerings

November 2

Evening Prayer On this day to honor All Souls, prayer begins in the monastery church at 4:30 p.m. and concludes with services in the sisters' cemetery.

November 16

Solemnity of St. Gertrude This Benedictine saint is the patron of the Federation of St. Gertrude to which the monastery belongs. Sister Joella Kidwell is president of the Federation.

November 19-21

Christkindlmarkt The town of Ferdinand, including the monastery, celebrates Christkindlmarkt each year. Scheduled for November 19-21, 2011, preparations begin several months prior to the event. All volunteers are welcome to work with the sisters during the preparations and the actual days of celebration.

The Simply Divine Bakery at the monastery is already preparing for the November event. To help now or during the Christkindlmarkt weekend, contact Sister Jean Marie Ballard at 812-367-1411, ext. 2620.

The sisters will play hand bells during the opening ceremony Friday evening and at a concert on Sunday afternoon in the monastery church and again Sunday evening at French Lick. To assist with set-up for any of the hand bell programs, contact Sister Rose Wildeman at 812-367-1411, ext. 2609.

Sister singers will perform during the two Sunday concerts. To assist at the 3 p.m. concert, contact Sister Anita Louise Lowe at 812-367-1411, ext. 2640. Assistance is needed to sell CDs and distribute programs to the public.

If you're not sure where you can best help, please contact Sister Mary Philip at 812-367-1411, ext. 3515, to discuss possibilities.

December 8

Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception Bishop Thompson will preside at the feast day Eucharistic celebration at 4:30 p.m. The meal after Mass is for the religious community.

December 17-23

Evening Prayer Join the sisters as they sing the "O Antiphons" during Prayer at 5 p.m. (ET)

Christmas Eve

Eucharistic Liturgy Music will begin at 9:30 p.m. with Mass at 10 p.m. Refreshments are offered after Mass. Join the sisters as ministers of hospitality before Mass or Eucharistic ministers during Mass. Many volunteers are needed. Contact the liturgy office, Sister Anita Louise, at 812-367-1411, ext. 2640.

January 1

Announcement of Jubilees On this special feast day, the religious community honors all sisters who will be celebrating a jubilee during 2012. The observance on this day is for religious community members only. The sisters who will be celebrating during the year: 70 years—Sisters Mary Alice Schnur, Mary Kenneth Scheessele, Johnette Finis, Sylvia Gehlhausen; 60 years—Sisters Maura Beckman, Vera Kloeck, Mary Benet Goodrum, Mary Roman Dall, Mary Claude Croteau; 50 years—Sisters Mary Louise

Uebelhor, Norma Fultz, Patricia Ann McGuire, Christine Marie Fendel.

January 6-8

Come and See Young women are invited to spend the weekend with the sisters, participating in presentations, praying, working, and recreating. The theme for the weekend is "The Gift of Community Living."

January 15

Oblate Meeting Sister Louise Laroche will share the joy of the "Praise and Thanksgiving Psalms." The presentation begins at 1 p.m. (ET) Morning prayer is at 10 a.m. with Mass at 10:30. Dinner immediately follows Mass. Reservations required for dinner and the afternoon meeting. Contact the Oblate office.

July 7

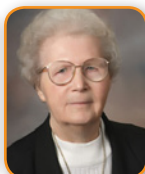
Summer Social Mark your calendar for the 2012 summer social.

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

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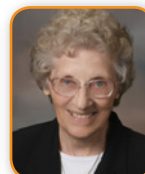
Sister Mary Alice



Sister Mary Kenneth



Sister Johnette



Sister Sylvia



Sister Maura



Sister Vera



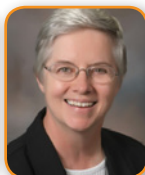
Sister Mary Benet



Sister Mary Roman



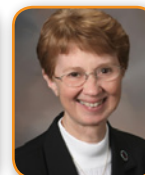
Sister Mary Claude



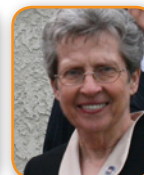
Sister Mary Louise



Sister Norma



Sister Patricia Ann



Sister Christine Marie

Four Received as Oblate Candidates

On Saturday, September 24, 2011, Reverend Pamela Smith and Reverend Earl Menchhofer were received as Oblate candidates. Sister Mary Ann Verkamp is their companion for the year of study in preparation for Oblation in October, 2012. Pamela and Earl are married to each other and both are United Church of Christ ministers for individual congregations in the Hoyleton, Illinois, area.

During Midday Prayer at the September 25, 2011, Oblate meeting the Rite of Reception was held to receive Ruth Goepfrich and Dolores Webber as Oblate candidates. Sister Karen Joseph will companion Ruth and Sister Jolinda Naas will companion Dolores Webber through their year of study in preparation for Oblation in October, 2012. Ruth is from Ferdinand, Indiana, and Dolores is from Paducah, Kentucky.



New candidates Pamela Smith (right) and Earl Menchhoffer receive assistance from their companion, Sister Mary Ann Verkamp, as they receive their Oblate medals.



Pamela Smith and Earl Menchhoffer often come to visit and to volunteer at the monastery.



Candidates Ruth Goepfrich (third from left) and Dolores Webber (fourth from left) listen to Sister Kris Harpenau during their reception ceremony.



At the end of the reception ritual, Ruth Goepfrich (second from left) and Dolores Webber (third from left) pose with their sister companions, Sisters Karen Joseph (left) and Jolinda Naas (right).

Oblate Birthdays

November

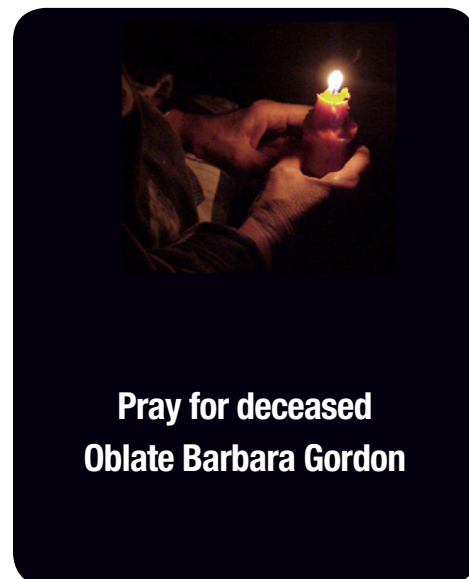
3 — Peg Albertson, 4 — Gloria Patnaude and Ellen Stanton, 6 — Phyllis Schmits, 8 — Marie Roberge, 10 — Bob Cadwallader, 18 — Denise Marcellais and Mel Schroeder, 22 — Lawrie Hamilton, 23 — Norma Lennartz and Janet Ziliak, 27 — Ruth Ihrig, 29 — Patricia Hopf

December

4 — Shirley L'Esperance, 13 — Lillian Keplin, 14 — Dolores Gourneau, 27 — Sharon Champagne, 28 — Jeanie Jollie

January

2 — Kathleen (Murphy) McTiernan, 6 — David Richards, 13 — Lynn Belli, 16 — John Kohl and Jackie Richards, 25 — Susan Roussin, 30 — Kathy Knust and Pamela Smith



Pray for deceased
Oblate Barbara Gordon

Oblate Picnic

The Oblates began their annual August gathering by witnessing new Postulant Beth Fritsch's (far left in photo at right) entrance into the Ferdinand religious community at the beginning of Morning Prayer. The Oblates and some sisters then shared a picnic lunch and an afternoon of games. Special thanks to June Goforth, who initiated activities that helped Oblates get to know each other.



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1. Sister Wilma Davis and her brother, Abbot Tom Davis, join the Oblates for lunch. Sister Wilma was an Oblate director in Belcourt and is a former member of the Oblate team at Ferdinand.
2. New inquirers John and Tena Karcher (standing: center and right) introduce themselves while Dolores Webber (standing, left) and Carolyn and Jim Werner await their turn for introductions.
3. June Goforth gives directions for the next activity.
4. Oblates and Sisters are actively engaged in getting to know more about each other.
5. Sister LaVerne Scheller (far left) and Oblate Olivia Adler reminisce as Rita and John Kohl observe.
- 6-8. Happy faces throughout the afternoon festivities.



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Oblates

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Two Oblate Candidates Make Their Final Oblation

Mary (Cheshire) Lamberg and Phyllis Schmits made their Oblation on Sunday, October 16, in the monastery church. The Rite of Oblation presided by Sister Kristine Anne Harpenau, prioress, was held during the sisters' Morning Prayer. All Oblates who were present also renewed their oblation. After Morning Prayer and Mass all the Oblates joined the sisters in the monastic dining room for dinner.

Mary and Phyllis completed their year of study of the Rule of St. Benedict and Benedictine spirituality. Mary was companioned by Sister Donna Marie Herr, OSB, and Phyllis was companioned by Sister Eileen Reckelhoff, OSB.

Mary, from Owensboro, Kentucky, said, "Oblation means a deeper connection to the spiritual and to the community. I always look forward to my monthly visits and am looking forward to sharing the experience with my baby, who is due to arrive May 5, 2012."

Phyllis, from Ft. Branch, Indiana, said, "I am very excited to make my Oblation. I have studied with Sister Eileen and it has been a wonderful experience. My desire is very great to be a part of the Oblates."



Sister Eileen Reckelhoff, Oblate Phyllis Schmits, Oblate Mary Lamberg, and Sister Donna Marie Herr pose for a photo after the Oblation ceremony on October 16.