

De Sales Says...

“God loves with intensely tender love those of us who are happy enough to abandon ourselves entirely to his fatherly care.”

Winter – 2005
Volume 18, Issue 1

Meet an Oblate

In the Spotlight

John McMenamin, O.S.F.S., originally from Elkton, Maryland, graduated from Salesianum, the Oblate high school in Wilmington, Delaware in 1946, and immediately entered the Oblate Novitiate in Childs, Maryland. After completing his education at Catholic University and De Sales Hall School of Theology, he was ordained in 1959 and spent most of his years in ministry in secondary education at various locations. Prior to his retirement in 1999, he spent fifteen years in pastoral ministry in Oklahoma. Presently, he lives in Toledo, Ohio at the Oblate residence next to St. Francis de Sales High School.

Q: What attracted you to the Oblates?

A: The pastor of my childhood parish, Immaculate Conception, was an Oblate and he was truly the

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Salesian Spirituality

Letting Difficult People Draw the Best from Us!

By John Kasper, O.S.F.S.

So the pastor frantically charges into the Faith Formation Director's Office and says: "I'm stuck. I've got a funeral today and I can't find anything good to say about this guy. He was always complaining about everything we've tried to do in this parish. He was stingy in his contributions. He gave everyone on staff a difficult time, never had a nice word for anyone in the parish. I'm going to feel like a hypocrite at the funeral Mass." Trying to be encouraging, the Faith Formation Director says: "Think harder; there's got to be something good you can say about him." The pastor ponders: "Well, his brother was worse!"

Let's face it. Not a day goes by that we don't find ourselves having to deal with somebody we don't like. Often it's a matter of a personality conflict. The introvert in you can't tolerate that loud and brash extrovert your neighbor invited to her dinner party. The emotional and sensitive side of you has a problem reconciling with the cold and calculating perspective of the rational person who dominated the meeting you just attended. Personal styles or temperament are just that – the unique set of inherited and learned qualities that shape our history and heritage, our emotions and ideas, our words and actions. We each respond to life in ways that are different from everyone else. Our individual personalities make life both interesting and challenging.

At other times it's not simply a matter of difference in taste or preference that puts you at odds with someone else; you hold the person in disgust because he or she represents a way of life or values that are in conflict with your own. The most recent presidential campaign pitted even family members and friends against one another over the moral values that underscored political party platforms. Co-workers found themselves unable to have a fruitful discussion about burning issues of the day because the stakes were so high and the emotional investment so intense: I don't understand how you could support such an idea? And you call yourself a Christian! Thus the discussion ended.

Short of putting yourself on a deserted island, we are ultimately and constantly bound to other people. It's our lot in life to learn how to get along, to practice patience and, hopefully, to come to enjoy the rich diversity of human creation. As Abraham Lincoln once said: God must love the common man (and woman!), he made so many of them. And Thomas Merton, reflecting on a conversion moment he had many years after he entered the Trappist monastery, wrote: It is a glorious des

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Spotlight on John McMenamin...

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kindest man I ever met. He certainly was one of the most significant influences in my life and made Oblate life appealing to me. I also spent the last two years of high school at Salesianum, and the talent and com-



John Mcmenamin, O.S.F.S.

mitment of the many Oblates who taught me there was stunning. I was attracted to the Oblates because of the great influence of all these men. When I first entered the Oblates though, I left the door open for other options. My family lived only a mile and a half from the Oblate Novitiate and when I left home to enter the Oblates, I told my mother to leave the back door open - just in case. Obviously, I never took that option and am glad I never did. I do not believe that I have lived a spectacular life, but I have lived a solid one. one that I've loved.

Q: What did you teach in the high schools you were assigned to?

A: My primary subject was foreign languages, German, in particular, as well as Spanish. I also taught English. The bulk of my tenure in secondary education took place at St. Francis de Sales High School in Toledo,

When I began at St. Francis there was only one American Oblate Province. In 1966 it was decided to split the province into two because our numbers were growing so large. St. Francis was in the Toledo-Detroit Province. At that time, all of us who were living in the "Western Province" were given the option to return to our home area or remain where we were. I was in love with St. Francis and decided to remain in the West.

Q: Do you have any favorite memories of teaching?

A: Well, I am rather proud of two things I accomplished during my twenty-years at St. Francis. First, in the mid-sixties, I initiated the scholarship fund. I began with donations of \$10,000 and 200 shares of Owens Illinois Company. That was a significant amount of money, but only the beginning. Our scholarship and tuition aid monies now are in the millions and provide a great service to many deserving young men.

The second thing I am pleased to have been part of is the foreign study program for our students. I inherited the program from Fr. Stahl who started it. Under my leadership

we sent young men two different schools in Europe. Annecy, France the birthplace and home of St. Francis de Sales and the home of the Oblate school, St. Michel, where our students lived and studied, and to Seckau, Austria. In Seckau the students lived at and attended the Benedictine School there.

The young men would be in Europe for nine months - eight months of school and one month of travel. In any given year we may have had up to 7 or 8 students studying in Europe. I remember when they returned to the United States, invariably they would be very positive about their experience and state that the greatest benefit was that they were able to see the U.S. through the eyes of Europeans.

Q: How do you look at the future of the Oblates?

A: I have a great and renewed hope for our future. The years following Vatican II were very challenging for many Catholics, in particular to those in religious communities who saw their tradition, lifestyle and the focus of their ministry go through great change. But in the last few years I have seen new hope and life arise in our community, both in our spirituality and our success in attracting new young members.

As a senior Oblate I'll never see the fruit of this, but I certainly believe it will happen. For now, I'll simply continue in my avocation as groundskeeper here at St. Francis and Gesu Parish. My specialty is edging and I'm great at it. §

The Best from Us!

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tiny to be a member of the human race, though it is a race dedicated to many absurdities and one which makes many terrible mistakes: yet, with all that, God himself gloried in becoming a member of the human race!



So how do we live and interact with one another, especially those with whom we have little in

common or who rub us the wrong way? How can we enjoy more fully our glorious destiny as members of the human race? Three reminders help me to maintain my own integrity without losing respect for those who don't fall into my comfort zone of easy and enjoyable relationships.

First, the command of Jesus in the gospel is to "love one another." I take his words to mean that Jesus knew I wouldn't "like" everyone. That would be an impossible and unrealistic task. Our Lord didn't command us to do that; he didn't like everyone he met. The gospels are filled with stories about Jesus' interactions with disagreeable characters. However, to transcend my personal likes and dislikes and to look for the spark of the divine in each person, loving all people because each is a child of God – that is the challenging, but achievable, goal of Christian living. That is what Christ asks us to do and what he shows us how to do.

Second, temperament is not destiny. The gospel holds before each of us the hope of conversion. Sorry, that's just how I am; I'll never be any different! Our faith resists such a response and invites us to be recreated anew each day. Of course we can be different; we have to be. The Holy Spirit dwelling with us is dynamic, never static. Movement and progress is the name of the game in Christian living. Our sights are always set on "the more" that we are called to be – never abandoning or disdaining the ego and the self that God gave me as gift, but always striving to overcome any barriers to

personal and spiritual growth.

Third, softening your style can help soften your soul and your attitude toward others. There are ideas and causes which draw out our passions – the things we care about deeply. If we're not careful those passions can be intrusive, overwhelming, even an annoyance to people. It's important to learn how to share our gifts in ways that don't edge out other people. Otherwise, they react negatively, we become defensive, and dialogue, the key to mutual understanding, goes out the door.

Among his insightful reflections on love, in Chapter XII of the *Treatise on the Love of God*, St. Francis de Sales considers how we love based on our different personalities: *Suppose there were two people equal in charity; one naturally kind and loving, the other of surly or sarcastic temperament. Undoubtedly they would both love God to the same extent, though not in the same way. The naturally kind-hearted person would love more easily, be more courteous, more gentle; but that love would not be stronger or more perfect. The love which springs from the obstacles and reluctance of a crabbed, unfeeling nature will be stronger, more illustrious; though the other may be more delightful and graceful.*

Always the gentleman, the optimist, the understanding and forgiving heart, St. Francis could make allowances for the great variety of people in this wide and wonderful world. His spirituality invites us to do the same. §

Oblate Life

Living Jesus in Formation

Michael Newman, Oblate Novice

“Live Jesus!” I’ve heard this saying quite a bit since I entered the novitiate last June. From appearing on letterhead, business cards, emails, and even greeting cards the expression “Live Jesus” or its French abbreviation, “V+J” has become one of the most popular Oblate sayings or catchphrases. However, like many of life’s popular sayings and catch phrases, it often can be tossed around, printed at the top of letterhead, and written on notes without much thought as to what “Living Jesus” represents and signifies.

Throughout my relatively brief time in formation I have had the chance to reflect on the meaning of “Living Jesus” on what it meant to Francis de Sales, what it means to the Oblates and on what it personally means to me and all men in formation.

The *Introduction to the Devout Life* offers Francis de Sales’ insight into the meaning of “Live Jesus.” The *Introduction* states: “Since the heart is the source of all our actions, as the heart is so are they. I have wished above all else to engrave and inscribe on your heart this holy and sacred motto, ‘Live Jesus!’” In this quote one first begins to get an idea about “Living Jesus” – namely that it must come from the person’s heart or innermost being. “Living Jesus” represented a person attempting to

live an authentic Christian life in a world that sometimes fears and distrusts authenticity. To de Sales and de Chantal, this was a sign that a person was attempting to live a devout life, a life oriented toward following God’s signified and permissive will in all circumstances. It was a battle cry against laxity, lukewarmness and against the idea that only a select few are called to be holy. By placing “V+J” at the top of all their correspondence, Francis and Jane publicly declared that they had decisively ordered their lives to Christ.

In the *Treatise on the Love of God*, Francis describes in greater detail how to begin to “live Jesus” through the activities and events of daily life. Francis states that “Great deeds may not always come our way, but at all times we can do little deeds...with great love.”

By doing these little deeds for God we begin to “win God’s heart and make it [our] own.” This is the virtue of simple charity. While this is good, Francis wants us to still go deeper and points out that eventually we will enter a time when “our option for God becomes a conscious and deliberate one in which we ‘prefer him, and to love him, above all things.’” It is in this conscious and deliberate action that we truly begin to “Live Jesus.”

A corollary to Living Jesus is the Direction of Intention. This prayer helps to unite all of our deeds to God. By praying the Direction of Intention throughout the

day, we are able to consciously recall that we are living in the presence of God and that all actions, large and small are to be done for love of Him. A simple form of the Direction of Intention is as follows: “My God, I give you this action. I offer you all the good that I shall do and I promise to accept, for love of You, all the difficulties that I shall meet. Help me to conduct myself in a way that is pleasing to You. Amen.”

Just as in the Direction of Intention one offers and dedicates to God all actions and misfortunes, so in “Living Jesus” one accepts all actions and manifestations of His will. “Living Jesus” actually completes the Direction of Intention.

In praying the Direction of Intention we interiorly accept all good and bad actions that will come from God, and in “Living Jesus” we exteriorly show how we accept these actions. We continue our promise to accept all difficulties and transfer it into our actions. The interior life is made present in the exterior life. The promise made to God in the Direction of Intention takes flesh in our actions.

Fr. Louis Brisson and Mother Mary de Sales Chappuis, founders of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales took the action of “Living Jesus” and placed it within the Oblates by means of the *Spiritual Directory*. Through practicing *The Spiritual Directory* we allow Jesus to live in our daily lives. Fr. Brisson states “In following the Directory exactly we lead the life of

“Live Jesus”

our Lord Jesus Christ on earth.” This is furthermore the wish of Mother Mary de Sales Chappuis who insisted that “the Savior may be seen walking the earth once more” in the members of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales.

My own personal reflection on the meaning of V+J began last year as a Postulant. As a teacher at St. Francis de Sales High School, I began each day by writing “V+J” on the corner of the blackboard. By the end the first month of school, one student in every class asked about the meaning behind the V+J. I would explain to them that the V+J stood for a strong concerted commitment between God and myself; that as an Oblate I wanted to live Jesus and act towards all of my students exactly as Jesus would. It was a reminder to me, I said, to try and place all my actions in union with Jesus.

As a novice, the idea of “Living Jesus” has taken on added depth especially with regards to the idea of community. I am currently part of the largest class of novices in nearly 18 years and a member of the joint Toledo-Detroit and Wilmington-Philadelphia novitiate.

This year, as I’m sure is true in most novitiates, has had its good and bad moments. In the novitiate we begin to form ourselves as Oblates - to “live Jesus” in our daily lives through the *Directory*. What has amazed me is again how very normal the life we live is. There is no prescribed daily habit, no bizarre customs, or outward actions that would draw attention to us as nov-

ices. Instead we do work on our interior, attempting as best we can to “live Jesus” in our ordinary life of schoolwork, daily chores, and the occasional day long “recreation” of snow shoveling. However, as we do this work interiorly, the fruits of it are seen in our community.

Through community meetings, outings and group retreats we have “lived Jesus” with each other and, as is typical of Oblate customs, challenged each other through that specific Oblate “virtue,” eutrepelia.

The idea of “Living Jesus”- acting so that Christ may be seen on earth through us as a result of our actions, was the theme of the inter-provincial formation days held in Washington DC between Christmas and New Years. The focus of the formation days was “Living Jesus from the center,” and dealt with how we can “live Jesus” in our daily lives. “Center” is currently a popular buzzword making its way through popular spirituality and psychology and can be thought of in terms of the Salesian idea of the heart. As de Sales says in the *Introduction* “Since the heart is the source of all our actions, as the heart is, so are they.” The heart is the source of all our actions and desires. From the heart comes the motiva-

tion behind all of our actions. It is where we begin our relationship with Jesus through prayer and then manifest this relationship to the world in our actions. The formation days focused on concrete ways that we could “live Jesus” both in community and in the world. In our discussion sessions we talked about

The Oblate Direction of Intention

“My God, I give you this action. I offer you all the good that I shall do and I promise to accept, for love of You, all the difficulties that I shall meet. Help me to conduct myself in a way that is pleasing to You. Amen.”

“Living Jesus” is authentically acting as Christ would in our daily affairs, due to interior conviction, so that His presence is again felt on earth. These manifestations of His presence are numerous throughout the men in formation in both provinces.

“Living Jesus” is an ordinary action done in everyday life. Salesian Spirituality is concerned with responding to God’s signified and permissive will in the midst of daily life. All of us in formation in both provinces are attempting to “live Jesus” so that, whatever stage of Oblate formation we are in, we can truly say that Christ lives and walks the earth through us. §

Reflection

A Winter's Journey

By Jolene Witt

I took a walk through the January woods the other day, in search of winter's beauty. It was to be the first step on my journey to revive and reclaim my faith, which had become battered and sorely bruised. My heart had quietly whispered to me, that in the beauty of winter, I would once again see the face of God. However, as I began my journey on the snow-covered path, I didn't see the face of God at all. I saw only the deadness that winter had to offer.

The trees were stripped bare of their beautiful fall garments, and their bark was as dry and brittle as my faith had become. Nothing moved except winter's cold wind that stung my cheeks and burned my lungs. Even the branches overhead appeared as gnarly, bent fingers clawing at each other in some imaginary struggle. "There is no beauty here," my mind scolded my breaking heart. "You won't find your faith in such a desolate place." My heart, weak as it was, pleaded that I continue on. So I trudged deeper into the winter woods.

Four dead leaves halted my search for faith in its snowy tracks. These four dead leaves clung lifelessly to a dead, barren branch and my withering heart could stand no more. A half-crazy laugh bubbled beneath the surface of my being, as I felt myself slip off the edge of hope. Dead leaves dangling from a dead branch! You've got to be kidding! "You're dead!" my mind

screamed. "Give up the fight! You have nothing left to offer. Just let go!" My mind then quieted and spoke once again to my heart. "There is no beauty here. Only dead leaves, dead branches and a faith to match.

It was then, when both my feet and my search stopped, that I caught my first sight of winter's true beauty that day. A deer in the distance lifted her head, alerted to my strange and new scent. With my thoughts interrupted and my feet no longer moving through the crusted snow, my heart heard a faint voice whisper, "Be still." The deer darted deeper into the safety of the thicket, but my feet remained firmly planted on the snowy path. "Be still." the whisper came again, and my mind obeyed. The words rustled once more through the four dead leaves dangling from the branch above my head. "Be still and know that I am God." I breathed the words in deeply and, as I did, they seeped into the cracks and crevices of both my heart and mind. I closed my eyes and allowed my heart to pull in all that was around me. I heard the pecking of a bird on a limb high above the treetops. I smelled the beauty of winter in my prickling, cold nose. And I felt the hand of God upon my shoulder. "Be still and know that I am God."

Slowly, opening my eyes, I was no longer standing in the same winter woods in which I began my journey. There were sights and smells and touches of life all around me. I was afraid to move, for the spell of faith being restored I feared to break. As I tilted my head upward in search of the pecking bird, the warm, whis-

pering voice washed down upon my face. "You are my beloved." Tears welled up in my eyes, and the guilt in my heart protested. "Me? No, there must be some mistake." For really, how can one who has lost the sight and touch of their faith ever be considered "beloved?" But the voice would not be silenced and, as it chanted again, the beauty of winter seeped into my being and together my heart and mind offered once single response: "Thank you."

"Be still." I wrote these words into the untouched snow beside my path and into the untouched cavity of my faith-searching heart. It is only in being still that we can see what really lies before us and within us. In my search I discovered my faith was never truly lost. It was only hidden, like the forest floor beneath the snowy blanket of white. And the face of God was never absent from my view. I had just forgotten what it could look like. The face of a deer, a bird in flight overhead and even four dead leaves dangling from a tree branch. Yes, even the leaves were now a symbol for me, a constant reminder for that tree – that *living* tree – of what it used to be and what it would be again in the coming spring. Those leaves didn't abandon the tree. They stayed, even through some of the harshest and coldest of days that tree had to face. We all have someone who stays with us through our harshest and coldest of days. God never leaves us or abandons us, even when we feel we have lost our faith. Like the four leaves, He stays. That is the beauty of winter and, in turn, the face of God. §

Live Jesus Today's Challenge

The Joseph F. Power, OSFS
23rd Annual Conference on
the Spirituality of
St. Francis de Sales
and
St. Jane de Chantal
August 4-7
Durham, North Carolina

The conference will take place at the Hilton Durham and will include a dedicated space for Chapel as well as a small Blessed Sacrament Chapel.

This year's theme will offer a Salesian perspective on the 40th anniversary of Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World from the Second Vatican Council, 1965.

We are very pleased to have three exceptional morning keynote presenters: Barry Strong, OSFS, Olivia Kane and Mickey McGrath, OSFS.

In the afternoons, there will be an opportunity to choose up to three presentations addressing a number of current concerns in our Church and World today.

Saturday afternoon will include "open space" meeting time in which people can gather around topical areas or in group affiliations.

Liturgy and Prayer will incorporate the "Year of the Eucharist" and Salesian themes, making it especially meaningful.

We look to the 2005 Salesian Conference to make a difference in our Church, in our World and in our Hearts.

Look for additional information on our web page: [HYPERLINK www.desalesresource.org](http://www.desalesresource.org) as it becomes available.

Our conference flyer will be mailed out in early spring. If you are not on our mailing list, please call us at 1-800-782-2270 or e-mail us at: desales@desalesresource.org.

Bondings is published four times a year for the members and friends of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, Western Province (U.S.A.). Its purpose is to enhance and develop the bond we have through our common faith and spirituality.

We have no bond but the bond of love.
—St. Francis de Sales

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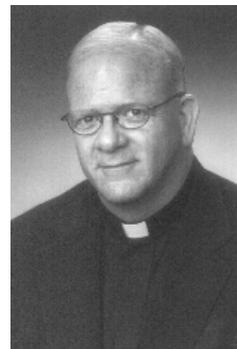
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From the Editor...

Dear friend,

It sure is good to have friends. I become aware of that every time I create a new issue of this newsletter. After all these years, it is sometimes hard coming up with new ideas for articles and then approaching people to write them.



The folks who contribute get nothing more than my gratitude and the questionable prestige of being published in this quarterly rag.

So, as I desperately called around for help, I found myself grateful to the busy people who contribute to **Bondings**. All give time, energy and their creativity to respond to my request.

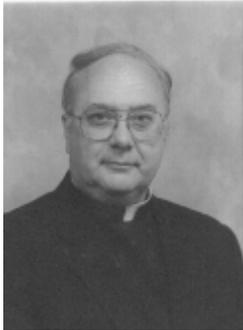
A new contributor in this issue is Jolene Witt (pg.6). She is a parishioner at my parish, St. Alphonsus in Deerfield, Michigan, a wife, a mother of three young girls and recently employed full time. Thanks to her, John Kasper a pastor of a large California parish and Mike Newman, an Oblate novice. All of you remind me how fortunate I am to have generous friends.

In Christ,

Jack Loughran, osp.
Jack Loughran, O.S.F.S.

Whatever happened to....

Jim Cryan, O.S.F.S., a native of Toledo, Ohio, is settling into a new position after twelve years as Provincial and a one-year, well deserved sabbatical. In November, Jim took over the pastorate of



Gesu Church in Toledo. Founded and administrated by the Jesuits, this past year they came to the difficult decision that they could not longer handle this responsibility. The Oblates naturally came to mind as the group to take over this parish, as it sits on the corner of a block with a Visitation Convent on one side and the Oblate high school, St. Francis de Sales, on the other. Jim has found getting back into administering a large parish and school challenging but loves the pastoral work that comes with it.

Dave Whalen, O.S.F.S., originally from Lockport, New York, took over from Jim Cryan as Provincial and is finding his second year in office not quite as overwhelming, but still a challenge. Dave moved from academia, as a professor at the University of St. Michael's College in Toronto,

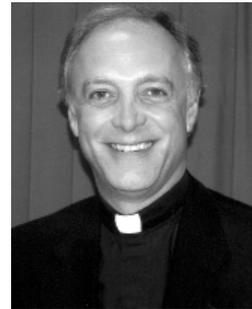
to the world of budgets, personnel, travel, lawyers, communication with lots of different entities and even dealing



with the press. In the midst of all this he oversaw the move of the Province Offices from their previous location to their new home in the former convent of Gesu Parish. He's still trying to sell the old office and residence. One wonders why he's already talking about a sabbatical.

Marty Lukas, O.S.F.S., from Lewiston, New York, continues his work as the Vocation Director for the Toledo-Detroit Province. As a testimony to his talent and skill in this field, a year

ago he was given the honor of being asked to be a member of the board of the National Religious Vocations Conference (NRVC). This group provides support, training and inspiration for vocation directors for religious communities throughout the nation.



Marty lives at Gesu Church in Toledo and his office is there as well. His responsibilities require a great deal of travel and flexibility. Meeting with young men interested in Oblate life and mentoring them in their discernment. Oblates often tease Marty asking, "Just when is your sabbatical over?"

Oblates of St. Francis de Sales

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