



Spring 2014

BONDINGS

THE QUARTERLY OBLATE MAGAZINE

[V+] | OBLATES OF ST. FRANCIS DE SALES | TOLEDO-DETROIT PROVINCE



JOYFUL SAINT, JOYFUL POPE



JOYFUL CHRISTIANITY

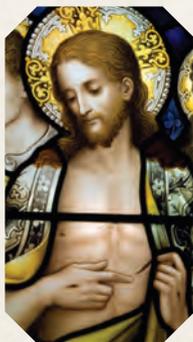
The cover illustration by Oblate Brother Micky McGrath accompanies the lead article in this issue written by Father Jim Greenfield, Provincial of the Wilmington-Philadelphia Oblate Province. He contrasts the spirituality of De Sales and Pope Francis and finds a remarkable harmony. They both exude a joyful optimism and invite us to find that joy in our Christian lives.

Father Ken McKenna, Provincial of the Toledo-Detroit Province, speaks of his recent trip to the Oblate missions in southern Africa and the work of Father Wally DeSa, OSFS in particular. Oblate missionaries have served in Africa since 1871.

Special thanks to Oblate Fathers Alan Zobler and Ken McKenna for photos that accompany articles in this issue.

As this issue reaches you, there are several weeks of Lent left and then the great feast of Easter, the center of our faith. We wish you and your family a rich share in the blessings of both Lent and Easter. As color and beauty return to the earth after a hard winter, it reminds us of the risen life we are called to. May we find the rich joy in our lives that De Sales and Pope Francis speak about, remembering De Chardin's statement: "Joy is the infallible sign of God's presence!"

— Editorial Staff



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MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales of the Toledo-Detroit Province is to "Live Jesus" according to Salesian spirituality in our personal and communal lives, and to share this spirituality with the People of God.

BONDINGS

Bondings is published regularly for the members and friends of the Oblates of St. Francis de Sales, Toledo-Detroit Province. Its purpose is to enhance and develop the bond we have through our common faith in Jesus Christ and Salesian spirituality. *Bondings* is free of charge to anyone on request. Send your name and address (or that of a friend) to the Provincial Office or call **419.724.9851**.

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JOYFUL SAINT, JOYFUL POPE

by Father Jim Greenfield, OSFS
Provincial of the Wilmington-Philadelphia Oblates

Both St. Francis de Sales and Pope Francis tell us to be joyful – a message deceptively simple, yet deeply profound. “There are Christians whose lives seem like Lent without Easter,” says Pope Francis in his exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* to underscore the virtue of joy in the life of every Christian. These two Church leaders, separated by more than 400 years, align the call to joy in a number of ways. I share three.

First, they both ground their identity in the fact they are sinners and then remind us that sin is never the last word. When asked in an interview, “Who is Jorge Mario Bergolio,” the pope responded, “This is the most accurate definition. It is not a figure of speech, a literary genre. I am a sinner.”

De Sales, in the *Introduction to the Devout Life*, stated: “We must not fret over our imperfections ... we must be sorry for our faults, but in a calm, settled, firm way.” He wrote further: “Alas, my poor heart, here we are, fallen into the pit we were so firmly resolved to avoid! Well, we must get up again and leave it forever. We must call on God’s mercy and hope that it will help us to be steadier in the days to come.”

Second, they both situate their ministry in mission. Pope Francis is clear that “we don’t reform the

Church just to make it more administratively efficient.” In fact, one of his real concerns about the reform of the Curia is “there is going to be a mighty temptation on the part of the Council of Cardinals to think of reform precisely (as) an organizational flow chart.” In an address to the Latin American Bishops’ Conference this past summer, Pope Francis said the reform he is interested in “will result from the very dynamics of mission. What makes obsolete structures pass away, what leads to a change of heart in Christians, is precisely a missionary spirit.”

Wendy Wright, in her book, *Heart Speaks to Heart: The Salesian Tradition*, wrote of the newly ordained Francis de Sales’ missionary spirit: “In the Chablais, the young Francis learned the art of respectful conversation and constructive apologetics: He sensed



the intrinsic dignity of each person who is to be revered as such, even when – perhaps most when – the ideas they hold or the affiliations that claim them make them an ‘enemy.’ De Sales was a true man of genuine reconciliation, a man for whom love and its realization was not simply the goal but the means.”

Finally, both ground their priesthood in healing wounds and warming the hearts of the faithful. Pope Francis suggests that mercy and forgiveness are more impor-

ant at the end of the day than judgment. He says, “The thing the Church needs most today is the ability to heal wounds and to warm the hearts of the faithful. The Church needs nearness, proximity. I see the Church as a field hospital after battle.” He also tells us that the formation of priests, nuns and brothers is a work of art, not a police action, and that the result should not be the creation of “little monsters”!

De Sales teaches that we can catch more flies with a spoonful

Jan. 26, 2014, Gesu Church, Toledo OH: Father Jim Greenfield, OSFS (center, blue sweater) with the Oblates who attended the De Sales feast day celebration.



of honey than a barrel of vinegar and this attitude truly exemplified his pastoral approach as a bishop, and, more importantly, as a gentleman. He said one time, commenting on the tears he wept at his mother's death: "I am a man and nothing more." Similarly, Pope Francis said recently: "Just think of religious who have hearts as sour as vinegar – they are not made for the people. In the end, we must not form administrators (and) managers, but fathers, brothers and traveling

companions."

Indeed, additional similarities bring a rich unity between our bishop-patron and the Bishop of Rome. DeSales' Jesuit roots are evident in the pope's obvious identity as a son of Ignatius. What's more, as we strive to be disciples who are eager to advance the mission entrusted to us, we are called to a clear joy, straight from the Gospel, that marks us as sons of a Salesian tradition whose joy is enflamed as we live Jesus.



OBLATE MISSIONS IN NAMIBIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

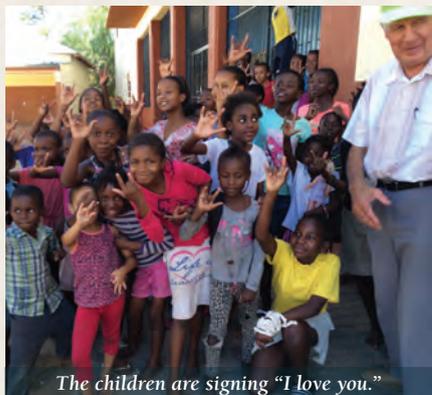
INTERVIEW WITH FATHER KEN MCKENNA, OSFS
PROVINCIAL OF THE TOLEDO-DETROIT OBLATES

When and why did you go to Africa?

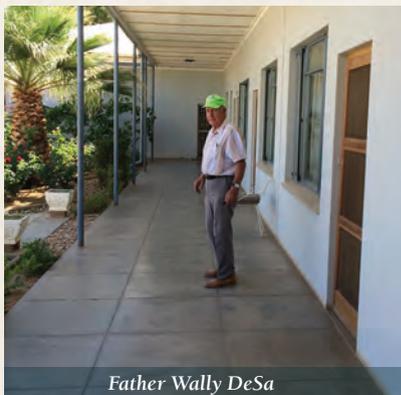
I went to visit Father Wally DeSa, OSFS, a member of the Toledo-Detroit Province. In 1968, at the age of 32, Father Wally left Father Judge High School in Salt Lake City for Africa. When I heard he was retiring this year, after forty-five years of mission work, I wanted to personally thank him for his service. I arrived on Nov. 25 – just as schools were letting out for summer vacation.

What were your first impressions?

When we arrived at Father Wally's mission, I knew I was seeing the work of a lifetime. Construction is one thing, but Father Wally physically gathered the stones, made the bricks, mixed the cement and welded the trusses. He built a church, church hall, school, rectory, library, baths, garages and numerous other buildings with his own hands. Simultaneously he pastored a parish, directed a residential school for 200 students and ran a large ranch with livestock. He was involved with construction at other missions as well. Forty-five years and countless hours ... it really was amazing.



The children are signing "I love you."



Father Wally DeSa



Sister Maria Josepha, an Oblate Sister of St. Francis de Sales



Exterior of Cathedral in Pella, Namibia and (below) the interior.



How many Oblates are in the southern African mission?

We have 30 Oblates in South Africa and Namibia; 22 African Oblates, three Americans and five Europeans. There also are a good number of Oblate Sisters.

It was in 1881 that Pope Leo XIII asked Father Brisson to send missionaries to Africa. What is the continuing importance of that mission?

When the Oblates arrived in Namibia in 1881, they found a sparsely populated, semi-arid land yet to be evangelized. They had to start from scratch, building the country's first Catholic churches and schools. It is said that Bishop Simon, OSFS, Namibia's first bishop, built the cathedral in Pella using construction techniques he found in a French encyclopedia. Other 19th and 20th century Oblate missionaries followed suit,

building churches and residential schools throughout the area. Oblate Sisters and lay teachers taught children while parents moved through the arid countryside with their herds. Today, 90 percent of Namibians identify themselves as Christians and many of them are Catholics. The Oblates continue to serve this Catholic population, running mission parishes, aiding the poor and educating children.

Did you travel alone?

No. Father Mike Depcik, OSFS had enough miles for free passage to Johannesburg. Father Mike is one of only a handful of deaf priests in the world. The trip gave him a chance to meet deaf Catholics in Johannesburg, Pretoria and Soweto. He also presided at several parish Masses. People were not used to seeing deaf people in such roles (before Mass one sacristan asked me: “Can he read!?”) We were later told that Father Mike’s Masses made quite an impression.

Any final thoughts?

Nelson Mandela died hours after we left the country. As his accomplishments were remembered and celebrated, I thought of all the Catholics worldwide who support the African missions and all the Oblate missionaries past and present. They tilled the soil with the Gospel so that Mandela’s message and example of nonviolence, forgiveness and reconciliation could germinate in the hearts of those who had suffered so long under apartheid. It was a privilege to meet the Oblates and Oblate Sisters involved in this holy work.



*Fr. Wally in Aranos, Namibia
in the mission church he built.*



BEING ALIVE

by Father Roland Calvert, OSFS

Bobby, the protagonist of Stephen Sondheim’s musical *Company*, sings a powerful song at the end called “Being Alive.” We have come to know Bobby in the show as a deeply commitment-phobic man who fears loving anyone because he will lose his autonomy and control. But, at the end, he admits that you’re not fully alive until you’re able to do that. “Alone is alone, but not alive,” he sings.

That is the message also of Lent and Easter. It is not until we love that we come alive, giving our heart to God and others. Yes, we will lose some “control,” but only then are we fully alive. Jesus even suggests at one point that we will find ourselves in the process of losing ourselves.

That paradoxical statement is illustrated in the life of St. Léonie Aviat. She took this motto at the beginning of her religious life: “To forget myself entirely.” But, in forgetting herself, she found a deeper, truer, richer self in God. She led an incredibly dynamic life, touching countless lives, especially her students and the Oblate Sisters of the congregation she co-founded.

Jesus is the great template we try to model our lives after. We see Jesus “losing himself” on Good Friday as he gives everything he has

to God. He embraces complete poverty and finds the incredible riches of Easter. It should be the pattern of our lives: finding out how to die and rise with Jesus each day in small ways – trying to “live Jesus” as fully as we can until we share the risen body the Lord will give us and know the fullness of salvation.

Someone once remarked that the tragedy of life is not that we die, but rather those things we allow to die within us while we’re still alive. Death can occur at times long before the day of our funeral.

The Lenten readings and the magnificent liturgies of Holy Week and the Easter season call us to come alive, giving our hearts and lives to God and others in loving service as Jesus did.

Indeed, “Alone is alone, but not alive.” It is only in loving God and others that I become fully alive.





FAVORITE SALESIAN SAYINGS

“Upon awakening in the morning, turn your thoughts to God present everywhere. Place your heart and your entire being in God’s hands.”

– St. Jane Frances de Chantal, VHM.



I like this quote for three reasons. First, it is a wonderful reminder each morning that I am not alone in the journey of life. God is present everywhere and I begin the day with him (perhaps I should say God begins the day with me). Secondly, there are many parts of me, especially the heart, but St. Jane encourages me to place all of me in that sacred presence. There was a time when I didn’t want God’s help with my struggles in any area of my life. Now I am able to humbly ask God’s help whenever and wherever I need it. Thirdly, I like the quote because of its implied meaning – that I am really precious to God. After all, God holds me in his very hands!

– Sister Suzanne Homeyer, VHM. Minneapolis, Minn.

“Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God,” said Pope Francis. Inspired by Father Jim Greenfield’s exposition of the parallels between the spirituality of Pope Francis and De Sales, we offer a quote from the pope in this section usually reserved for Salesian saints.

St. Francis de Sales, Doctor of the Church, is sometimes called the Doctor of Love because of his emphasis on the love of God and neighbor. There are no less than six chapters in the *Introduction to the Devout Life* on friendship. After the Chablais experience, a missionary spirit marked the rest of his life as priest and bishop, writer and founder.



Here’s how that message from the pope develops: **“Whenever we encounter another person in love, we learn something new about God. Whenever our eyes are opened to acknowledge the other, we grow in the light of faith and knowledge of God. If we want to advance in the spiritual life, then we must constantly be missionaries. ... Only the person who feels happiness in seeking the good of others, in desiring their happiness, can be missionary. The openness of the heart is a source of joy. ... (Evangelii Gaudium #272)**

– Father Tom Helfrich, OSFS. Clarklake, Mich.

THE GENEROSITY OF GOD'S LOVE KNOWS NO BOUNDS!

Salesian Reflections by Joanne Kinney



When we allow our human heart to be surrounded by God's heart, we find joy and hope in the nooks and crannies of each moment and God present in every wrinkle of our day. This awesome love that God has for us is a touchstone of Salesian Spirituality, a spirituality for everyday people living everyday lives through the teachings of Saints Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal.

Sometimes it is hard to believe that God loves us without condition. After all, we are not all loveable and no one of us is loveable all of the time. But we can be thankful that God's love does not depend upon us. It is simply in God's nature to love us. God's love knows no bounds!

What does this unconditional love for us mean? Are we to simply wallow in it for ourselves? We know that is not God's intention as we are commanded to "love one another as I have loved you." Francis de Sales tells us, "We will not often have the opportunity to do great things, but everyday, we will have the opportunity to do little things with great love."

De Sales believed every person is beloved by God and called to be holy, and that living out this holiness is found in how we love. He tells us "Be who you are and be that well so that you can bring honor to the Great Artist whose handiwork you are."

A friend of mine is a sister who taught young children for many years. She tells the story of one little guy in her first-grade class who was the bane of her existence that year. He couldn't sit still for two minutes. She remembers walking up to him and placing her hands on either side of his face and saying with great frustration, "What am I going to do with you?" His eyes got big as saucers as he said to her, "Sister, no one has ever loved my face before."

The way we touch people, with our words, with our physical touch, with our careful expectation truly makes a difference. We do not have the benefit of God's ability to love unconditionally. We are human and affected by the world we live in, but if we open ourselves to accept God's unconditional love for us, to believe that we are truly God's beloved, then we can be the presence of truth and joy for one another. As God's beloved, we too can become the lover.

– Joanne Kinney is administrator of DeSales Resources and Ministries in Stella Niagara, N.Y.



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