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Oblate Mount Angel Abbey

St Benedict, OR USA

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and all Benedictine Spirituality Retreats

Good Morning (Afternoon) Introduce myself?

When asked to give this short presentation I was given the questions: How has becoming an oblate changed my life and deepened my spiritual life and what do I do as an oblate that makes a difference in my life and the lives around me? For me personally I could answer in three simple statements: Becoming an oblate saved my life, gave me life and renewed my life.

In 1980 a friend invited me to go to a place called Mount Angel Abbey. I thought what a great idea to get away for a quiet weekend. We arrived in the middle of the night (she was always very late to go anywhere). We found a note telling what rooms we had, found them and fell into bed only to be awakened a few hours later by lots of very loud bells! I thought this maybe was not what I needed and not such a good idea. All I wanted to do was sleep in late for a change. Little did I know how that first weekend at the abbey and the eight years following, going 3-4 times a year, would impact and change my life.

During those years I had no desire to get to know any of the monastic community or really to find out anything about becoming an oblate. In fact I had no interest at all. I only knew it was a place that kept calling me back. A place where I found incredible peace and found the prayer schedule beautiful and fulfilling. I wanted to get up when those bells, that the first time I found annoying, rang at 5:15 am. The call of the bells six times a day become a lovely sound that gave me time with God that I had never had before in my busy life at home.

However, since God had control not me, sooner or later the guest master, oblate director, began to pursue me about matters of going on organized retreats and becoming an oblate. I kept calmly informing him that I had no desire to do either! I was so busy in my church and community that joining something else was not on my list of things to do. After 8 years!, he finally convinced me to go to a retreat with our teenage son. He never mentioned the word oblate! After the retreat he again asked me to go to an oblate retreat. Well, I did! By the end of the weekend I was an oblate novice ! I still was not convinced but decided why not, I can always back out before final oblation. As you may have figured out by now I was not the person seeking a way of Benedictine life and spirituality. I just sort of fell into it.

No sooner had I become a novice than my life began to fall apart. Along with major things happening I began to have times of severe depression, many times wondering if I wanted to keep on living. I hardly left my home except to go to mass and once to the abbey. I spent my days in bed and crying. I could not seem to find the God I had known so well. Then came the weekend of my final oblation. For reasons only God knew at the time I went to the abbey for the retreat. I informed Fr that I would not be making my final oblation and gave him all my reasons why. I certainly knew I was not worthy to make final oblation. He informed me that I was worthy in the eyes of God and that almost everyone felt the same way before their oblation no matter where they were in their lives.

He told me "You are going to do this because now more than ever you need to be part of the community especially in communion with them in prayer." I told him I did not IND couldn't pray anymore and he said, "that's ok they will be praying" So in obedience I made my final oblation. (Now I knew nothing about obedience in the rule, I had never read it or prepared for oblation in any way!) I went home and to make a long story short the healing began. The prayers of the community, the counsel of a monk whom I had never known who approached me at vigils and became my good friend and the counsel and friendship of the oblate director, Fr Bernard, saved my life and along with my oblation gave me new life, a rebirth into a deeper spirituality I had never experienced before.

As I began walking in this new life I realized that I had not joined some new organization but God was calling me to a vocation, one that I had been called to in high school. A vocation that I could have along side my married vocation of now 44 years. A renewal of my life in my home, my church and in everything I did and who I was! I discovered a rule that was perfect for beginners! A rule and spirituality that embraces us with the knowledge of who we are and who God wants us to become. It loves, teaches and calls us back to begin over and over again if need be. I way of life that the only requirement is that I am authentically seeking God.

The beginning of the rule in the prologue immediately spoke to me as it said, "Receive willingly and carry out your loving fathers advice, that by labor of "obedience" you may return to Him from whom you had departed."

There was that word obedience and I knew that by obeying the loving advice of the oblate director I had begun my return to my Heavenly Father from my place of disobedience, a place of not caring about the gift of life He had given me and when at the end of the rule it reminded me how the rule was written for beginners and again I quote, "Whoever you are, therefore, who are hastening to the heavenly homeland, fulfill with the help of Christ this minimum rule which has been written for beginners." Needless to say I felt as if the rule had been written just for me and was speaking just to me!

So now, I begin each day hoping and praying that I will be a better oblate, one whose way of life will be an example to others in a quiet, unobtrusive way. That by example I will draw them to a closer relationship with God so that all I do will give GLORY TO GOD! So first and foremost I hope the preceding statement is most importantly what I do to make a difference in the lives of others. What other things do I do that I hope make a difference in the lives of others? WELL, when God decided to make some changes in my life He took me on a most unexpected path. I was always a very organized woman who was very involved in service both in my parish and community.

Becoming an oblate started me in another direction of service. After my oblation and after I got my feet back on the ground again the oblate director informed me that I was to be in charge of the oblate monastic living retreat! I told him I would pray about it and about a half hour later as I passed by his office he handed me some files and said just do it! So again in obedience I began to work for the oblates. This one retreat has turned into many other jobs and is almost full time work. Soon the other things in my life, art auctions, galas etc seemed to carry no interest for me.

God was pulling me to a totally different kind of leadership. A leadership under an abbot and oblate director, everything done under authority, with permissions only. A leadership of service to others who were seeking and striving for a closer walk with God and who were looking for something beyond their busy lives. They were finding it at a monastery, in quiet retreats and prayer. Prayer in a different way than they had experienced before. Discovering it in a little rule, in silence and in a disciplined prayer life at home, in learning and practicing lectio divina, all in a wonderful addition to their lives called Benedictine Spirituality!

I believe God took me to the abbey in preparation for the hard time that would be coming in my life, knowing that the prayers of the monastic community would sustain me and in preparation for the work He would call me to do. I have now worked as a volunteer at my abbey for 19 years. This is a wonder since I live four hours away and cannot drive! My wonderful husband supports me in all I do and makes sure I get there for the 10 days at a time that I need to be there. I hope and pray I have made a difference in the lives of some of the wonderful people and oblates who come to our hilltop. Thru them I have learned and grown from their wisdom and desire to walk a path of Benedictine spirituality. I pray God will continue to work thru me in the same way a monk enters the monastery "solely to serve God". This work is not mine but His. May it always be said as in Psalm 115, "NOT TO US LORD THE GLORY BUT TO YOUR NAME ALONE"

Thank you and bless+SDG
Soli Del Gloria