



HELPING THE MONKS IN PRAYER

OBLATES OF AMPLEFORTH ABBEY

Do you want to help the monks? They pray every day in the community prayer called the Office: St Benedict calls it the Work of God. Why not join with them in doing something similar, and pray in association with them?

- 🕯 You can do this using a form of daily prayer yourself, related to the monks prayer.
- 🕯 You can follow the spirit and wisdom of the monks' way by putting ideas from the Benedictine Rule in your own life.
- 🕯 You can, if you wish, settle this way by becoming an associate of the Community, an Oblate.

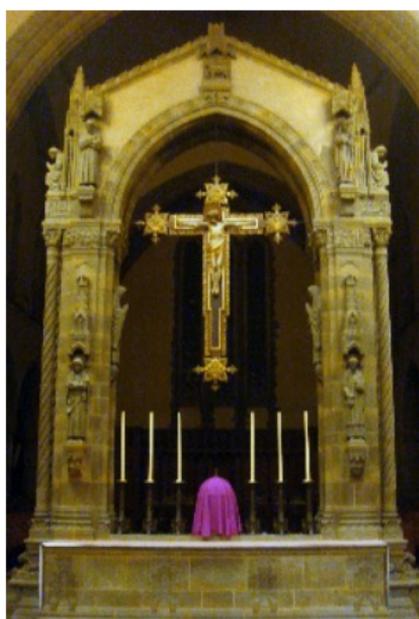




OBLATE LIFE

Oblates seek to extend Christian life and follow Benedictine spirituality. The key element is sharing the prayer of a particular monastic community, and to become involved with its life. They also carry the spirit and influence of St Benedict into ordinary life, as simplicity, stability, obedience, humility peace.

PRAYER & THE OFFICE



The monks' life is centred on the person of Christ. A key feature of that life is some kind of formal – patterned – prayer, often called 'Office', based on psalms and listening to the Word. This what the Community do, and is the most direct way in which Oblates can help and support them, and be helped and supported by them. It does not have to be the exact form followed by the monastery, though it may be; it can indeed be much shorter, for people often have other many responsibilities. But it should share in the same elements and have a similar pattern and regularity.

We have made a small prayer book, *Lord open my lips*, which provides a good starting point and is suitable for well-occupied people.

THE OBLATE PROMISE

This commitment or promise is in principle for life, but, because it is not in the eyes of the Church a vow, it does allow for termination if circumstances seem to call for this, for example if someone is called to join a more formal religious community, or to transfer to another monastery, if someone moves to the neighbourhood of another monastery. This is not common, but it is perfectly acceptable.

A BENEDICTINE WAY

Features which may mark the life of an Oblate are:

- 🕯 An increased share in the Eucharist, where possible;
- 🕯 Greater personal frugality;
- 🕯 The practice of recollection, stillness or silence;
- 🕯 Adopting features of the life and spirituality of St Benedict's Rule which ordinary lay life allows;
- 🕯 To make daily or at least frequent times, if only short, for 'lectio', praying from the wording of Scripture (or the Rule, or other Christian source). 'Little and often' is the best method;
- 🕯 active involvement in the parish community.

Life can reflect the principle of *obedience*, by letting the Spirit lead one through circumstances, of *stability*, by keeping to a more regular pattern of life, of *conversion*, and of *conversion* in seeking always to grow in Christ-like perfection, especially in humility. And to follow St Benedict is to follow the Gospel teaching.





*Christ conquering Death
Viewed from the Choir*

WHO CAN BE AN OBLATE?

Anyone in full communion with the Catholic Church (and so fully able to relate to the Catholic community of the Abbey) can become an Oblate, but it is normal to be over 18. Someone, however, someone who is already a member of a religious institute, or already committed to some other community, would not be an appropriate candidate.

Sometimes one who approaches the monastery because he or she feels drawn to

become an Oblate, or who simply wishes to explore the idea, is unknown to us, so that a period of dialogue or visits will be appropriate. Indeed, this may be the case with those who know us well.

At some point it is a good idea to give as a reference the address of the parish (or other church organization) to which one belongs. It is good to come to know at least some members of the community, and be in some contact with the monk in charge.



Whose feet will you wash? Eucharist & Service: a monastic altarpiece

YOUNGER PEOPLE

We recognise that in our time younger people are looking for (or are already at home with) something like the Benedictine spirit, and they are welcome. Their age can be itself a gift and support to the Community. But in our time a newer generation lives in a moving world of change. The essence of monastic life is permanence: in principle the vows of profession are for life, for in no other way can they be the gift of one's self to the Lord. The Church, in its prudent wisdom, has nonetheless provided for temporary vows for those in early monastic life: this is reflected in Canon Law and in our Constitutions.

We think that a similar flexibility should be available to younger or new Oblates, in the following way. After whatever preliminary period is found helpful, which can be of some length, a simple commitment can be given (like simple vows) for three years, and renewable, as for monks. Later it will be possible to make the ordinary commitment as an Oblate.

If you are interested, write to the

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Many come to the Lamb in his Temple



OBLATE ORIGINS

It is helpful to understand how deep are the roots. In an earlier tradition of monasticism *oblati* were children or young persons 'offered' or given to the monastery as monks, in contrast to *conversi*, adults who chose to be 'converted' and to leave the world for the monastery. But the term *oblato* was soon used to describe lay people who wanted to work with monks, and at various times they actually did so, living near or in the monastic enclosure, and working as craftsmen or administrators. This was the case, for example, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the well-organised English abbey at Lamspringe in Germany.

There is thus a old tradition of Oblates being a help and support to their monastery in practical ways. For many this support will be given mainly by being associated with the monastery in the life of prayer. This is the modern sense, and the practice was revived in the late nineteenth century as part of the great European revival of monasticism associated with the Abbeys of Solesmes in France and Beuron in Germany. Provision for this was made by Rome in the 1890's.

But in the older sense someone who lived close by might act as sacristan or altar server, or help with administration, or flower beds, or proof-reading: and they still can when conditions allow.

CONFRATERS ARE DIFFERENT

From early medieval times there was another tradition, that of *confraters*, of *confraternity*. This was a special association with the monastery, in the gift of the Abbot, usually given only to royal patrons or distinguished patrons and benefactors. There have been some Confraters of Ampleforth since the earlier twentieth century, but Oblates were not established by the Abbey until 1980. The difference is important. Oblates respond to a personal vocation and make a personal link to the Community from anywhere in the Church: Confraternity is simply a gift of the Abbot, in recognition of support or friendship, but without particular commitment.