



THE OBLATE

Newsletter of Newark Abbey Oblates

Issue 25

Winter 2012

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First of all, every time you begin a good work, you must pray to him most earnestly to bring it to perfection.
(RB Pro 4)



FOCUS— Past & Present

by: Don Brennan

On June 25, John Baier served as Deacon at a Mass celebrating his recent ordination to the Diaconate. John preached at this Mass. Following Mass, John and his wife, Joan, hosted a breakfast in the Abbey refectory. The oblates presented John with a stole and Joan with a cross containing the medal of St. Benedict.

MONKFEST was moved to August last year and there was no oblate activity in July.

On August 13, Fr. Albert Holtz, OSB invested Catherine and Jacob Quainoo as oblate novices. They received the Jubilee Medal of St. Benedict as well as a copy of The Rule of St. Benedict. The Quainoo's were to leave shortly for a visit to their native country of Ghana and they were able to begin their year of formation before the usual fall timeframe. Fr. Albert also led discussion on Chapters 19 through 30 of The Rule. Prayer can change our lives if we pray wisely, truly and well. Through prayer we can establish a relationship with God who always is in relationship with us. In dealing with others, such as in meetings, a Benedictine mindset would include cooperation with the leadership and would exclude personal ego satisfaction. In our communal living what emphasis do we put on our independence and individualistic lives? In our communal living do we provide an atmosphere of love and understanding when failures occur...or is perfection the goal? These chapters provided much thought for consideration and discussion.

MONKFEST occurred on Sunday, August 21. See article on page 6.

Fr. Mark Payne, OSB led the September 10 meeting when we continued using Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister's book, *A Spirituality for the 21st Century – The Rule of Benedict*. Chapters 31 through 42 were

covered. Fr. Mark presented a short synopsis of each chapter which was the basis for small group discussion. Each group was assigned two or three different chapters for discussion and then reported back to the entire group about their findings. One item presented from discussion was that busyness can keep us from facing what we do not want to look at. Being quiet can be scary sometimes. Good discussion characterized the results of the small group discussions.

On October 8, during the Community Mass, Abbot Melvin Valvano, OSB received the Final Oblations of Matthew Basile, Sergio Cortes and Karina Lucid who had completed their Year of Formation as oblate novices. Abbot Melvin also received the Renewal of Oblation from fourteen oblates in attendance at the Mass. A celebratory coffee time was then held in the Hospitality Center. At the meeting, Abbot Melvin spoke about the writings of Johannes Tauler, a 14th century Dominican mystic and author. He presented us with several quotes from Tauler and expounded on some of them. The oblates were greatly impressed with the meaning derived from Tauler's writings and were glad to be introduced to this mystical writer. After the Abbot's remarks, Mary Ellen Doran, Kristen Wisniewski and Don Brennan gave a report about their attendance at the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors meeting held in July, 2011. Kristen put together a power point presentation using her technical expertise. The theme for the meeting was "Embracing Creation with Reverence and Hospitality: Listening to Scripture and Rule Speak." It was decided that the theme of the meeting would be used as the basis for several oblate meetings in 2012.

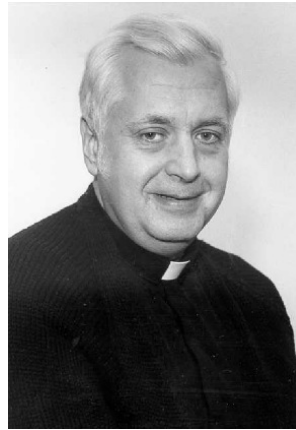
Continued on Page 4...

Funeral Homily for Fr Matthew Wotelko, OSB

by: Abbot Melvin Valvano, OSB

Acceptance...surrender...hope...

Dear Sisters and Brothers, all dear friends of Father Matthew: Three days into his first hospital stay a month and a half ago Matthew recounted to me the next day in the hospital clearly and with great care this event:



I was awoken at 2AM this morning I believe by God. I felt completely surrounded, inside and outside so to speak, by God. I felt I could not move, and I did not. I stayed like this with a sense of this indescribable Divine loving presence for some while--many minutes-- and then this prayer formed within me and I want you to begin your homily with it. And please I ask you very seriously make the homily short.

He read his handwritten famous scrawl text slowly and with a sacredness that I felt. He said here: please re-type it for me. I read:

Acceptance...surrender...hope...

May I respond to the events of these days in ways and with attitudes that will bring me closer to you, Lord, and your love for me. In your mercy and love, bless me with the willingness, grace and power I need to know your will and to carry it out. Thy will, not mine be done! Amen.

Please tell everyone in church how blessed I have been over the last 27 years of my life living, and helping all my friends to live the Twelve Step program of spirituality. Making and keeping personal connections with complete and ruthless personal honesty trying to draw each person together to the center who is God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Slowly one day at a time and in any circumstance, failure, sorrow, pain or little victory one relies more on God and what God seems to desire of me and less and less second guessing when a catastrophic health event attacks to ask only to do God's will

as God explains it to me here and now—today. Do God's will today!

Absolutely clearly for me over the past two years or so Matthew courageously and successfully faced catastrophic, actually un-resolvable personal situations with himself or as he assisted other persons with a gigantic faith that felt on occasion that he could and did move mountains. This faith was so brave and bold, so out of proportion to the run of the mill religious faith which uses our own puny moral muscles maybe making us capable of this or that. No! This spurious sort of questionable/suspicious "secure faith"-- Matthew might dub it --was not the divine faith he lived and breathed, one day at a time. He did not disparage it as not good but it must only be a beginning of further dark/divine journeying.

Father Matthew began 27 years ago as he requires you and me to recognize and understand slowly but persistently to let God control his life-not his emotions and feelings and not his deficit- packed past. Once he began he accepted each day with divine gratitude-- and he never, never took back his will. The spiritual agent within him grew so large that in recent months one sensed that Matthew was always operating from this mountain's perspective and with God's own brand of powerless power. Unerringly, I believe it pushed him to regularly face and fix on God's own point of view in this or that situation, person, problem or challenge. He had become -- not quite completely yet of course-- taken up entirely into the powerlessness of the Crucified One, totally divine terrain, to such a profound all-absorbing degree that Matthew genuinely reveled in his weaknesses, all of them, because the power of Christ Jesus in his saving and sanctifying weakness, was and is recognized by its chief credential, utter absence of personal control. His connection with Jesus Christ worked mighty deeds in and for himself and in the persons who could listen to him.

It drove him crazy whenever he heard that "We do not deserve God's love" OR, worse, "We are all sinners and we do not deserve God's love". Yes, we have all heard it or perhaps said it

Fr Matthew Continued...

or thought it or felt it: we do not deserve God's love. Hogwash. Nonsense! Say then the little baby does not deserve his parents' love! We always remain every single day of life's journey in precisely this relationship with God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. I shall not continue here with our occasional like-minded conversations on benighted and dangerously simplistic notions of human freedom and what sin is. This could last too long for Matthew's sense of his eulogy.

Allow me to respect Matthew's request and end with something he said in a recently taped interview about himself and the monastic life. Please remember that for decades he lived a most faithful life of common daily prayer and work, celebration of the Holy Eucharist, obedience to an Abbot and community, and daily *lectio* and meditation. Here are his own beautiful thoughts on his, our, and all healthy living.

I quote Matthew. "One of my strong beliefs in terms of psychology, theology and the spiritual life is that the key is staying connected, that is, me to myself and me and others and me and God. My interest in the monastery had nothing to do with God or religion or spirituality. I was fascinated by how well the monks interacted with each other, considering that

they had such a wide range of personalities. I would see all different combinations of them walking down the hall, laughing, fooling with each other, fooling with students... there's that need for connection. "Gee, I would like very much to be a part of that life style that permits this. I'm sure there is room for me in there." I have thought for years that the reason why I joined was extremely unspiritual, and now I've come to see exactly the opposite, that it is the essence of spirituality—which is this connectedness."

Matthew died on Wednesday the Feast of the Conversion of St. Paul. "Yet whatever gains I had these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, if somehow I may attain the resurrection of the dead." (Phil 3, 7) Amen.

Mark Your Calendar!

March 10	Lenten Day of Reflection (Extended Day — bring a bag lunch)	TBA
March 31	Service Day—Chruch Cleaning for Easter (following 8:45 Mass)	
April 22	Joint Meeting of NJ Oblates (St Mary's Abbey, Morristown—Meeting follows 11:00AM Mass & lunch)	Megan McKenna
May 12	Embracing Creation With Reverence	Panel of St Benedict's Students
June 9	*Saving God's Green Earth—Chpts 3&4	Fr Albert Holtz, OSB
July 14	Centering Prayer & Lectio Divina	Veronica Dagher & Br Maximilian Buonocore, OSB



*Saving God's Green Earth - by Tri Robinson (ISBN: 0974882585) available for purchase online at Amazon.com

Book Review—The Book Thief by: Kristen Wisniewski

As editor, I decided a good idea would be to start a book review section. I will start this section with one of my favorite books of all time (and yes...I read A LOT!)

The Book Thief by Markus Zusak.

It might be a tough sell...a 576 page book about a girl growing up in a foster family during WWII in Nazi Germany, narrated by death. Have you stopped reading yet? Have I completely turned you off from the book already? I hope not!

I always start by telling people about one of the most interesting characters in the book, the narrator—death. This is not the typical character that would come to most people's minds. It's not the "grim reaper" of your nightmares and scary movies. This character is funny, sad, philosophical and very observant of human life. He is an integral part of the story and in my opinion, makes the book unique and interesting.

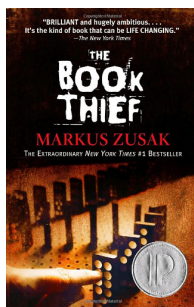
With the book's story occurring during WWII, death is quite busy (as you can imagine!). However, he is not too busy to take notice of Liesel Memenger...the Book Thief herself. Liesel is a foster child trying to figure out how to grow up with her rough foster mother and loving foster father in a working class neighborhood. A very likable girl, Hans, her foster father, teaches her how to read. One of the many gifts he gives her. This intensifies her book thievery...and so the story is born.

This book is in the category of "historical fiction," a book that is fictional set around a historical time or event. To me this is another key element of the book. It gave me a little peek not only into WWII, but also into Germany at that time. I had never thought about "the other side" before. The war is always there in the background until it literally comes into Leisel's house.

The characters that Zusak weaves are incredible and make you want to read more and learn more about these people. Each one plays a role in the story of Leisel's life, the life of the town, and also as part of Germany during that time.

This book is not "spiritual" or "religious" in the classical sense, however, I found this book making me dig deep into my own self and ask myself questions I wouldn't normally be thinking of when reading a fictional novel.

So pick up this book and don't let the first few pages discourage you! Stick with it! It's worth it!!



Focus Continued...

The annual Mass of the Faithful Departed was celebrated on November 5. Following the Mass the monks and oblates hosted approximately forty people for a reception held in the Hospitality Center.

See separate article on page 7 for the oblate retreat held in November.

Fr. Albert spoke about "Like the Dewfall:" - Advent in Eucharistic Prayer II at the December 19 meeting. This was a very appropriate Advent topic because of the new changes in the Roman Missal used for Mass which became effective on the first Sunday of Advent. He made reference to Jewish Scripture where "dew" is mentioned as coming down from above. Heaven touched earth with the birth of the Messiah. We ourselves are heaven touching earth. How does God touch earth through me? Doing God's will! Taking time to listen, to pray, to look for models to imitate, such as our Blessed Mother Mary are ways in which we can be heaven touching earth. Some good discussion revolved around the changes in the new Roman Missal and the richness in the new translations.

The January 14 meeting introduced the 2012 meeting theme "Reverencing God's Creation in All Things". This theme will be the basis for several meetings during the year. Kristen Wisniewski arranged a showing of part of the DVD produced at the July 2011, Oblate Directors meeting at St. Meinrad Archabbey. Don Brennan provided background information about the Directors meeting and introduced the topic for the current meeting. Kyle Kramer, one of the featured speakers on the DVD, made an impressionable presentation about his concerns for all of God's creation. The title of his talk was "Spirituality and Sustainability". Kyle is a captivating speaker and spoke about his life as the director for graduate theological study for non-seminarian students at St. Meinrad's seminary and his life as a farmer. Kyle, his wife and two young daughters participate in renewing the earth on his twenty-seven acre farm. The soil had been overworked by previous farmers and Kyle has studied all aspects of what needs to be done to make the soil healthy again to raise crops. This is no simple task and Kyle has devoted his energies to doing this while holding down his professional job. Kyle is a convert to Catholicism and his deep rooted love for the Rule of St. Benedict keeps him grounded in what is important not only for caring for all of God's creation but also for caring for his spiritual life. His presentation was well received and favorable discussion followed the viewing. Mary Ellen Doran, Kristen and Don provided comments during the presentation.

Br Mark Hayden, OSB Funeral Homily

by: Fr Francis Flood, OSB

Our Br. Mark had such a great sense of humor! I used to joke with Br. Mark all the time! Paraphrasing a line from Holy Scripture, I would ask him: "Can anything good come from the State of Kentucky, especially from a little town with the funny name of Fancy Farm?" He would just sit there and smile, and then call me what he always called me: TERRIBLE THE GREAT!

Br. Mark Hayden of the Order of St. Benedict, came to Newark Abbey ten years ago when his Abbey, St Maur, in Indianapolis was closed. He is what we call, a "late" vocation, having been a Benedictine monk for ONLY 44 years! Yet Br. Mark never stopped thanking God for his calling to the Benedictine way of life!

Our second Reading today mentioned the words of the Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Romans (8:35) and I'm sure they're familiar to most Christians. They say: "What shall separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?" In this Chapter, St. Paul seems to have one desire: he seeks to comfort those who are afflicted, and to afflict those who are comfortable! His words took on a new meaning for me as I thought about our dear confrere, Br. Mark, especially this past week.

I always assumed that St. Paul meant to say that nothing could separate us from the love Christ holds for us. But now I find myself wondering if the Apostle meant something more. Of course, he wants to assure us that Christ's love abides with us throughout the thick and thin of life. And yet isn't it possible that St. Paul meant this: Who can separate us from the kind of love Christ revealed? Think about it. What does a Christian look like who fails to express the love of Christ? Can there be such a creature as a Christian, separated from the love of Christ? I have my doubts! Perhaps because Br. Maximillian, Br. Patrick, and I have had the blessed opportunity to bask in the light of Christ's love radiating from the heart of our confrere, Br. Mark, these past ten years while we provided his much needed nursing care!

Of course, Br. Mark, being the good Benedictine Monk that he was, always had such a humble personality, and he often expressed his great joy and happiness in his calling to serve our Lord as a Benedictine Monk, no matter what he was called upon to do. We all know that life can deal us some pretty lethal blows! One day we're high on life, the next day we're in the throes of turmoil. Today we can feel on top of the world, tomorrow we can feel as though the world is heavy on our shoulders. And through it all, the real threat to our emotional well being is what?

Not that our Lord ever withdraws His love from us. Rather, we tend to withdraw from the love of Christ! It's so hard to express the love of Christ for others, when we feel crushed, abandoned, forsaken, and forgotten. The experience of sickness and pain can cause even the Christian to withhold the love of our Lord from others. And then there are those other Saints! They experience great hardship, and by some miracle of God's love, their hearts are enlarged! This was true of our confrere Br. Mark! His heart was never separated from the love of Christ and so, he radiated the love of our Lord to others!

Sometimes I wonder that perhaps the greatest flaw in our Christian character isn't the failure to worship God or the desire to earn God's approval. Maybe our greatest flaw is in our unwillingness to follow the example of other Saints who have come through their most difficult struggles still aglow with the love of our Lord for others. Perhaps we are gifted with the presence of such persons as a reminder of what Christian life and love are really all about! For those who knew him well, we look at the life and love of our confrere Br. Mark, and you'll see what I mean!

I see a holy man who embodied the graceful presence of Christ and the power of his overwhelming love! I see a 92 year old monk who knew more of his fair share of pain and sorrow; being blind from Glaucoma these past 9 years; experiencing the pain from his prostate cancer and arthritis; and shortly before his death - his having a stroke and almost total deafness; and yet, I see a monk who never once withheld his love from his confreres. I see a Saint who taught his Community a profound and necessary lesson: If Christ will never withhold his love from us, then we, in turn, must never withhold His love from others.

There wasn't a day that went by, where Br. Mark did not thank me for caring for him. As he neared his death, he paid me the highest compliment a nurse, a confrere, could receive: he said that he was very lucky to have me to care for him all these years. But I disagree with him, it was I who was the lucky one!

I believe that Br. Mark, like so many other Christian saints, was God's gift to us. Looking at his life and the crosses that he had to bear, touched by his love, remembering his courage, we can better understand the meaning of St. Paul's words. "Who or what shall separate us from the love of Christ?" Quite frankly, no one, NOTHING! Certainly not from Christ's vantage point. But what about from our own? Will there be some person, some event, some trouble that will silence forever the love of Christ in our lives? There could be! The question I'm proposing is, should there be? Well, not if we have been truly touched by the life of our confrere, Br. Mark. Not as long as we have learned from his witness to a strong faith, his unrelenting hope, and his ever abiding love. And not so long as we see his life as a living, breathing testimonial to the power of Christ-like love!

Personally, I will treasure the memory of Br. Mark. I thank God for his life and his friendship! He was and is my ideal of a truly humble and dedicated Benedictine Monk. But above all else, I will remember him as a Saint, as one who time and time again, throughout his struggles and sadness, radiated with Christ-like love; because, Br. Mark taught me so well, that if Christ will never withhold His love from us, then regardless of what life holds for us, we must never withhold His love from others!

So, to answer the question posed as a joke mentioned earlier: Can anything good come from the State of Kentucky, from the Town of Fancy Farm, we answer wholeheartedly - YES! And if I may be so bold, speaking for Abbot Melvin and our entire Benedictine Community here at Newark Abbey, we will miss our beloved Brother very much, and we ask that he be remembered in your daily prayers as well.

Br. Mark's only desire was that he wanted to go to heaven. I'm sure that he doesn't have to worry about that anymore. May God bless you always, Br. Mark!

MONKFEST 2011

by: Don Brennan

MONKFEST was moved from July to August this year because of the change in the school year. St. Benedict's Prep is now closed in July and open in August. Celebrating its twelfth year, MONKFEST drew hundreds of people to an afternoon of fun, food, music, games, face painting, books and religious articles, tours and prayer. The Ladies of Peter Claver provided a variety of tasty foods and the men took care of cold drinks. Italian ice was also served. Oblates provided service by grilling hundreds of hamburgers and hot dogs. Chief griller Kristen "Wiz" Wisniewski battled smoke several times but never left the grill for the entire afternoon and cooked all of the hamburgers. Serge Cortes and Terry Quinn took turns cooking the hot dogs. Veronica D, Mary Ellen Doran, John Baier and Don Brennan assisted with getting the burgers and dogs to the serving table.

The inside crew headed by Alice Moore sold books, religious articles and other merchandise in the dining hall. Joan Baier successfully hawked T-shirts inside and outside. Assisting Alice were Lorraine Elias, Paula Roudette, Sarah Zaragoza, Joan and John Baier and Sue Scudder.

The day concluded with sung Vespers in St. Mary's Church at 6:00 PM.

Joint Meeting of Oblates

On **April 22**, the annual joint meeting of the NJ Oblates will be held at **St Mary's Abbey, Morristown, NJ**.

The Speaker will be **Megan McKenna**, Theologian, Storyteller, Spiritual Writer and Lecturer. Megan, a native of New York City has lived, visited and gypsied through North and South America (especially Bolivia/Peru), Europe and a collection of islands: Celtic, Japanese, the Philippines, Singapore, Haiti and the Hawaiian Islands and through Malaysia, India, Marshall Islands, Thailand, Australia and China. She works with Indigenous groups, in base Christian Communities and with justice and peace groups as well as parishes, dioceses and religious communities. She has been on the United States National Board of Pax Christi and in 2002 was appointed an Ambassador of Peace for Pax Christi.

Her website: <http://meganmckenna.wordpress.com/>

We Remember in Prayer:

- ✚ **Brother Mark Hayden, OSB**, monk of Newark Abbey
Born into Eternal Life March 2, 2011
- ✚ **Madame Mary O. Ibida** of Nigeria, mother of oblate Anthony Ibida—Born into Eternal Life January 17, 2012
- ✚ **Father Matthew Wotelko, OSB**, monk of Newark Abbey
Born into Eternal Life January 25, 2012
- ✚ **Winifred Onuba Gordon**, friend of the oblates, who is recovering from knee surgery
- ✚ **Margaret Joseph**, oblate, who is recovering from recent surgery
- ✚ **Mr. Buonocore**, ninety-five year old father of Br. Maximilian Buonocore, OSB, who is seriously ill
- ✚ **Daniel Moore**, brother of associate oblate director Alice Moore, who is seriously ill
- ✚ **Cindy Vena**, wife of oblate Joe Vena, who has had several hospitalizations resulting from a fall a few years ago
- ✚ **Employment for oblates and friends of the oblates** who are unemployed or under employed
- ✚ **Those who struggle or are recovering from addictions**
- ✚ **Vocations to Newark Abbey**

Lenten Quote from the Rule of St Benedict

Lent begins on February 22...
have you picked your book?

"During the days of Lent, they should be free in the morning to read until the third hour, after which they will work at their assigned tasks until the end of the tenth hour. During this time of Lent each one is to receive a book from the library, and is to read the whole of it straight through. These books are to be distributed at the beginning of Lent."

(RB Chpt 48:14-16)



Newark Abbey Oblates

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Director:

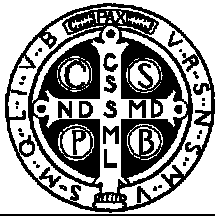
Rev. Albert T. Holtz, OSB

Associate Directors:

Alice Moore

Donald Brennan

www.newarkabbeyoblates.org



Liturgical Calendar / Feasts

February

- 14 Sts. Cyril, Monk, Missionary and Methodius, Bishop, Missionary
21 St. Peter Damian, Bishop, Religious, Doctor of the Church

-----*Lenten Season*-----

22 ASH WEDNESDAY

25 St. Walburga, Abbess

March

9 St. Frances of Rome, Married Woman, Religious Founder,
Co-patron of Benedictine Oblates

17 St. Patrick, Bishop, Missionary

19 JOSEPH * HUSBAND OF THE VIRGIN MARY

22 PASSING OF OUR HOLY FATHER BENEDICT, ABBOT

26 ANNUNCIATION OF THE LORD

April

1 PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION

2-4 MON, TUES, WED OF HOLY WEEK

5 HOLY THURSDAY

6 GOOD FRIDAY

7 HOLY SATURDAY

-----*Easter Season*-----

8 EASTER

9-15 OCTAVE OF EASTER

21 St Anselm, Bishop, Religious, Doctor of the Church

25 ST MARK, EVANGELIST

May

2 St. Athanasius, Bishop, Doctor of the Church

3 STS. PHILIP AND JAMES, APOSTLES

10 St. Damien Joseph de Veuster, Presbyter

11 Sts. Odo, Maiolus, Odilo, Hugh and Peter the Venerable, Abbots of Cluny

14 ST. MATTHIAS, APOSTLE

15 St Pachomius, Abbot

17 ASCENSION OF THE LORD

25 St. Bede the Venerable, Presbyter, Religious, Doctor of the Church

27 PENTECOST SUNDAY

-----*Ordinary Time*-----

31 VISITATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

June

1 St. Justin, Martyr

3 TRINITY SUNDAY

5 Boniface, Bishop, Religious, Missionary, Martyr

10 THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST

11 St. Barnabas, Apostle

13 St. Anthony of Padua, Presbyter, Doctor of the Church

15 THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

16 The Immaculate Heart of Mary

19 Romuald, Abbot, Religious Founder

21 St. Aloysius Gonzaga, Religious

24 BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

28 St. Irenaeus, Bishop, Martyr

29 STS. PETER AND PAUL, APOSTLES

July

3 ST. THOMAS, APOSTLE

11 ST. BENEDICT, PATRIARCH OF WESTERN MONASTICISM

13 St. Henry, Emperor, Married Man, Co-Patron of Benedictine Oblates

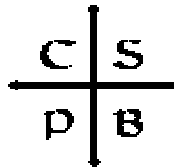
14 Bl. Kateri Tekakwitha, Virgin

25 ST. JAMES, APOSTLE

26 Sts. Joachim and Anne, Parents of the Virgin Mary

31 St. Ignatius of Loyola, Presbyter, Religious Founder

[Solemnities are in bold caps, feasts are in caps, lower case are memorials]



Editor's Corner

Questions, suggestions, submissions or miscellaneous
comments should be directed to Kristen Wisniewski, Editor at:
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