

# HELPFUL HINTS & CUSTOMS

for

# OBLATES of DOUAI ABBEY



*Cum permissu*

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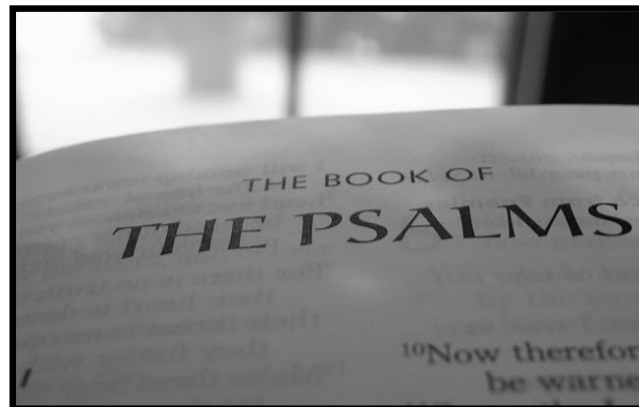
# INTRODUCTION



When we first join a new community or get involved with an established group, we are at a disadvantage. Not only do we have to learn the names of everyone, but we do not know the 'house rules' or customs. This document has been prepared to assist those who are considering joining the oblates or have recently joined. It seeks to explain what we normally do. It is not a list of instructions. We hope it clears away some of the uncertainty and makes people feel more at ease.

### General customs:

- 1 At certain times and in certain places we try to cut out talking and the normal courtesies of acknowledging people need not be observed: it is not rude to avoid eye contact in these circumstances, although a brief smile and nod is acceptable. The aim is to allow people to be recollected - without unnecessary interruptions. The period between Vespers and supper is one of these times, as is the time between morning office and Mass.
- 2 Many oblates like to wear the medal of St Benedict during oblate retreats.
- 3 Oblates are committed to studying the gospel of Jesus in the light of the *Rule of Benedict* and putting it into practice, and like to talk openly about what this means to them.
- 4 Oblates make their oblation in humility and do not look for recognition. Nevertheless, in certain circumstances like some conferences, it is helpful to indicate our commitment by the use of 'OblSB' after one's name, but this will be very rare indeed and is not encouraged.
- 5 Most novices try to say some of the Prayer of the Church daily, usually Compline, but not as a burden, and also to practise *lectio divina* on a regular basis, study the *Rule* and read books written about it, as recommended.



- 6 Oblates are encouraged to come to as many oblate retreats as they wish - but this is not obligatory, although every oblate should make every effort to attend *one* retreat each year. It helps greatly for oblates to get to know each other on retreats and feel part of the community. For some oblates however it is not possible for good reasons to make a yearly retreat; these remain in contact only by e-mail or letter.

- 7 Any Christian, whether Catholic or not, may become an Oblate of Douai Abbey.
- 8 Oblates pray for each other and members of the monastic community daily and especially when notified of death, sickness or other need.
- 9 When staying in the monastery, oblates do any obvious tasks such as moving chairs, clearing and washing up dirty coffee cups, seeing ourselves as part of the community rather than guests to be waited on.

### **House-keeping**

- 1 Mobile telephones should of course be disabled or silenced in the monastery but can of course be used outside or in one's room.
- 2 There is no smoking within the monastery buildings.

### **Relations with fellow oblates:**

- 1 Oblates treat each other as equals and use Christian names rather than titles like Father, Mrs or Doctor.
- 2 Oblates avoid direct criticism of others, seeking to encourage open discussion and tolerance.
- 3 We support each other in our difficulties, poor health etc with prayers, telephone calls and letters.
- 4 Oblates aim to be tolerant of people they find difficult, or those who find it hard to settle.
- 5 We make certain that new-comers are made to feel welcome, included in discussions etc.
- 6 It is helpful if those oblates arriving for an oblate retreat by car can offer to collect from Midgham station those oblates arriving by train. (At the time of writing the 17.12 from Reading arrives at Midgham at 17.29 on weekdays.) This is best arranged in advance through the oblate director.
- 7 At the end of a retreat some oblates might appreciate a lift to the railway station or Reading.

### **Relations with the monastic community:**

- 1 Oblates may decide in time to adopt the monastery's custom of referring to members of the community simply by their Monastic names, but it seems proper where one has not yet established a relationship, and certainly in formal circumstances, to use the title 'Father' or 'Brother'.
- 2 Oblates help new members to get to know the monastic community by discreetly pointing them out and identifying them by name if asked.
- 3 Oblates are free to approach any monk, but oblates who want to speak to a



monk can go through the oblate director first, unless they are already known to the other monk.

- 4 As for our financial relationship with the monastic community, most oblates do not offer to *pay* for hospitality as it is given freely by the monks in accordance with the *Rule* and no payment is expected. But if we can afford it, as many oblates can, we make a *donation* to the monastery. If this is by bankers standing order and not specifically given in return for visits, then it can be done under Gift Aid by tax-payers, *making it worth a further 25%* (in 2011). This however does not apply to one-off donations made on a visit, which are therefore worth less to the community. (Bed and breakfast in a very cheap place costs about £35 per day and full board rarely less than £50 and oblates do not like the monastery to be out of pocket, especially if they are in a position to contribute to the community's expenses.) But those on limited incomes should not feel under any obligation to donate anything if they cannot afford it.



**Customs in church:**

- 1 Holy water is taken on entering the church (correctly, not when leaving) and if someone is following you, it is polite to offer them your wet fingers first for them to touch before making your own sign of the cross.
- 2 At the kiss of peace, we give this only to those on either side of us at weekday Masses.
- 3 For the offices and weekday Mass we join the community in choir - on the left front row, on the right front row, on the left back row and if needed, on the right back row – as we approach the choir. At the Sunday Eucharist we sit with the rest of the congregation in the nave.
- 4 We are discouraged from doing as the monastic community do and using a misericord to recline when the seat is raised (if in the back row) because it is too easy to drop the heavy seat and make a loud noise.

- 5 We arrive well before the community so that we can be certain to have the necessary booklets, papers etc.
- 6 The Blessed Sacrament is reserved in the north chapel and we genuflect to the tabernacle normally only when passing in front.
- 7 It is the high altar which is revered on entering church. This is done by a careful and deep bow, not a genuflection.
- 8 It is an ancient custom to bow during the first half of the 'Glory be to the Father . . . and the the Holy Spirit.'
- 9 When waiting for the office in church to begin, we rise when the bell rings and face the altar for the beginning of the office, except Compline (because the reading of a chapter from the *Rule* comes first - then face the altar) and Mass, when we have the singing of the Introit.
- 10 Oblates are encouraged to join in the singing of the offices and at Mass, but discreetly so as not to drown out the community.
- 11 It is not done to make eye contact with others when in choir.

#### **At Morning Prayer:**

- 1 We face the altar during the singing of the invitatory psalm.
- 2 It is customary to make the sign of the cross on one's lips at the opening words with the thumbnail of one's right hand.
- 3 We sit as soon as the psalms begin.
- 4 We sit for the psalms during Lauds after the hymn.
- 5 We turn to face the altar for the *Benedictus*.
- 6 We then kneel for the concluding prayers.
- 7 We leave after most of the community have left - it is not necessary to hang back for them to go first as some remain in their places for meditation until Mass begins.
- 8 It is a good custom to do a meditation or reading in the church, one's room or the gardens in the half hour before Mass on weekdays.

#### **At Vespers:**

- 1 Vespers is sung in Latin and can be a bit confusing for those not familiar with it. We have a special note for oblates on this which you can ask for.
- 2 When the monastic community has arrived in choir, we face the high altar for the start of Vespers but turn inwards to bow for the *Gloria Patri*.
- 3 We sit for the psalms before the first antiphon is intoned.
- 4 We rise for the singing of the hymn.
- 5 After the antiphon to the *Magnificat*, we turn to the altar and face inwards

again for the *Gloria Patri*. Then we remain standing for the repeat of the *Magnificat* antiphon and the rest of the office.

- 6 At the end of Vespers the monks process out; oblates and guests remain in their places until the monastic community is out of sight behind the pillar.

### **At Compline:**

- 1 This is sung in English from the little Compline books. Note that at certain times the hymn is sung to a different tune and these are found at the back of the booklet.
- 2 When Compline is over (and on Saturday after the Litany of Our Lady), the monastic community processes to the Lady Chapel to sing the *Salve Regina* or other antiphon. Guests should follow the monks as quickly and quietly as possible, by the side route so as not to appear to be joining the procession, to be ready to join in the singing, taking the Compline books with them for the words and music (in Latin).

### **At weekday Mass:**

- 1 We turn to the altar for the 'Pray brothers and sisters' after the Preparation of the Gifts and then follow the community and form a semi-circle in front of the altar. The community wants us all to be as fully included as possible and waits to bow deeply to the altar when we have all arrived, so do not hang back as everyone will be waiting for you. The semi-circle can normally follow the black marble edging but may have to be further back if there is a very large number of people.
- 2 At Communion, those in the centre of the semi-circle break into two halves and draw back to create an exit back to the choir stalls for those who have received Communion.
- 3 When the monastic community have received Communion, we approach individually from one side then the other, just as the monks do. Try to avoid forming a queue.
- 4 At the end of Mass the monks process out, oblates and guests remain in their places until the monastic community is out of sight behind the pillar.

### **In the guest refectory:**

- 1 Meals are normally silent (except for some music) so we speak only when

necessary - pointing is acceptable! The first and last meals of a retreat are normally relaxed meals with talking.

- 2 We sit where the places are laid, but in any order.
- 3 We collect our own napkins and return them when the meal is over.
- 4 Meals in the guest refectory are self service - helping others to food is not necessary but clearing away after the meal is appreciated.

### **In the monastic refectory:**

- 1 In the rare event of being invited to eat in the monks' refectory, (perhaps on a private retreat of one's own) we let the monks look after us and take no initiatives.
- 2 Guests should not leave their places and wander round the refectory.
- 3 Guests should not talk to people in the refectory.
- 4 Guests should not hesitate to accept a second helping if offered as one won't get another chance.



### **In the guest rooms:**

- 1 At the end of a visit, we remove the bed linen from our beds and leave it ready with used towels for collection. We return cups etc to the guests' kitchen.
- 2 After using cups, glasses etc in the guest kitchens, we ensure that they are washed and put away.
- 3 We are asked to leave the guest sitting rooms tidy.

### **During oblate retreats:**

- 1 Oblates aim to contribute to discussion but not talk too much - be sensitive to the re-actions of others and allow them to speak.
- 2 We do not hesitate to question or give an opinion.
- 3 During common *lectio divina* led by the oblate director we try to restrict our comments in the first round to 'What is this text saying to me?' and in the second round to 'What is my response?' Be brief. We do not comment on the contributions of others during common *lectio* - it is not a discussion. If another monk or other person leads *lectio* then different procedures may apply and these will be explained at the start.
- 4 The oblate director is keen that we should try to keep the mornings free of unnecessary chatter and cultivate silence and recollection.

### **Final oblation:**

- 1 When oblates have completed a year or longer as a novice oblate, they may ask the oblate director, if they feel ready, to make their final oblation. One can take longer if one wishes. Applications go to the abbot's council for decision. There is a ceremony of final oblation in the abbey church, usually held during Mass on the Saturday of a weekend retreat or on the last day of a mid-week retreat.
- 2 Be ready to choose an additional Christian name if you wish.
- 3 Oblates write out their oblation promises by hand on a sheet of paper and during the ceremony sign this; it is then placed on the high altar at the Preparation of the Gifts. Thereafter it is kept by the oblate director in the archives. Oblates are provided with the wording in advance. Have your sheet ready to hand over at the ceremony and bring a pen.

