

Stability

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Stability may well be the single most important virtue that connects us Oblates to the monastic community. When one in five families moves every year, just being attached to a particular monastery can lend stability to our lives. Furthermore, even if we are not being relocated to a different place, it is very encouraging to be able to contact the monastic community at any time, by contrast to the hours or days it may take to locate others we wish to do business with. Ironically, the more flexible the communications network, often the more waiting we do. It sometimes takes more energy than ever to find someone. But not so in monasteries.

That monks have prayed faithfully in the same place for an extended period of time is one of the most potent reasons for harried people to seek out such places. There is more and more a need to be part of a stable community of people or of a particular place.

Sometimes the stability of monasteries may be perceived as static and untouched by the world, hence not so susceptible to the usual sorrows and vicissitudes of living. Some who live the monastic life may indeed live their lives as though static were the true meaning of the word. There is always the opportunity for ignoring new possibilities in such a stable environment and to simply "vegetate" rather than undergoing personal conversion. However, being impervious to change and being stable or steady are in fact quite different. Joan Chittister, OSB, writes that "the Benedictine spirituality of community depends on stability, on seeing things through, on working things out, on going on." She goes on to say that "everything in life, contrary to Madison Avenue's guarantees, can't be cured or resolved or eliminated. Some things must simply be endured. Some things must simply be borne. Some things must simply be accepted." The stability that community and relationships provide "hold us up on the days when we are very, very, down." Surely, this is the kind of support that all of us need. This is how we mature in a marriage, in a vowed life outside a monastery, as well as in the non-vowed single life.

Another monk wrote that "stability is not a separate vow, but rather part of a global profession of the monastic life, emphasizing enduring commitment and patience." Surely that, too, could be applied to the married life and the non-vowed single life. Hence, this way of approaching life is appropriate for all Oblates as well as for the monastic community itself.

The vow of monastic stability allows time to find depth within ourselves, among community members, and also the God within. Without stability we simply move from one encounter to another, always hoping that life will be better further on. Or as Thomas Merton wrote, first one must stand still in order to know where one is. "It is at the moment when you discover that God is everywhere, that you do not need to seek Him elsewhere, that He is here, and if you do not find Him here it is useless to go and search for Him elsewhere because it is not Him that is absent from us, it is we who are absent from Him....this is important because it is only at the moment that you recognize this that you can truly find the fullness of the Kingdom of God in all richness within you; when you realize that God is present in every situation and every place, that you will be able to say: "So then I shall stay where I am."