

# Genuine Mysticism

The mystic undergoes a moral transformation. Ordinarily this is a long process. The impediment is our clinging to our selfishness, our own desires, and our own willfulness. The mystic does not dissolve the ego in the psychological sense....on the contrary, in that sense the mystics have extraordinarily strong and healthy egos.

The moral transformation of the mystic is practical, showing plainly in appropriate social activities, and is steady. It is a concrete, everyday continuing life of justice, patience, generosity, and all the other virtues.

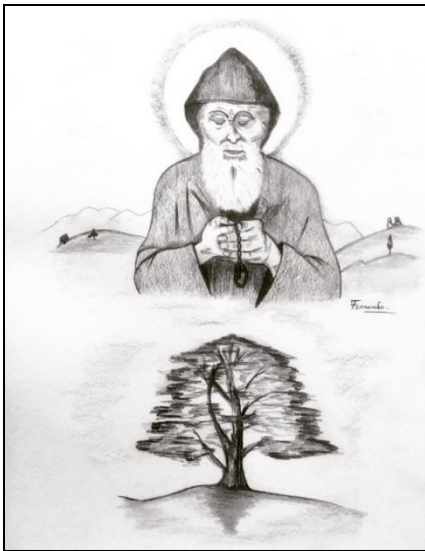
Genuine mysticism grows up out of and returns to a life characterized by common sense, intelligence, and rationality.

The genuine mystic has an enriched vitality and enters into worldly work with strength, interest, cheerfulness, and appropriate concern.

The genuine mystic will have a certain peculiarity in his attitude toward his work. He will be completely dedicated to it, study it with care, do his very best with all his resources in terms of the needs of the work itself and for its own sake, but he will not be attached to it. This means that if he succeeds, he will not exult or congratulate himself. If it fails, he still will not lament or despair. He does all that he can, and he rests in peace. This combination of dedication and detachment is an almost infallible test for the authenticity of the mystic's life.

The real mystic will have a sense of humor. He will not take himself seriously. He will be playful like a child, laugh easily, enjoy all sorts of simple things, be able to appreciate beauty, and thoroughly savor every aspect of life. He will relate comfortably to other people and all in all seem to be a most down-to-earth ordinary sort of person.

*Author Unknown*



## **Mysticism, A Summary Description by Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO**

Michael Casey, a Monk of Tarrawarra, wrote Stranger to the City, Reflections on the Beliefs and Values of the Rule of St. Benedict. Br. Michael mirrors many of my beliefs and experiences, so I happily share them with you.

"The Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner suggested that the Christian of the future must be a mystic. That should be the focus of the Cistercian formation."

"Without an explicit contemplative orientation, monastic asceticism makes little sense. Monastic life is a road that leads to union with God. What monastic life offers is a slow process of purifying the heart so that it can perceive the deep mystery in which we have been immersed."

It also teaches us how to develop a lifestyle that sustains a prayer-centered mystical life.

"Benedict himself takes for granted that such a transformation of consciousness is the normal result of a life lived in conformity with God through faith, obedience, patience, and perseverance."

"When we speak of mysticism, we are speaking of our capacity to be drawn sometimes into a zone beyond the familiar world of space and time, in which all our interior faculties come alive. What transpires during those graced moments is beyond language. God is a reality that we can never explain or prove." This grace God gives us is a life and fullness, perseverance in prayer and serving others.

Br. Michael cautions that, "if such experience sends us off on some prophetic crusade, it is unlikely coming from God."

"A mystical experience is one in which there is no direct causation within the spatio-temporal universe. It is the fleeting imprint of eternity on our dull awareness. It cannot be known directly. It produces humility and empowerment to do something long resisted as too difficult."

### **Some concrete examples of everyday mystical experiences are:**

- a) Conversation: It opens our eyes to see things differently and the energy to change the direction of our lives.
- b) Vocation: This gives us the courage to embark on a new life with God at the center and helps us accept the sacrifices involved.
- c) Compunction: It arouses the soul from its sleepiness and half-heartedness
- d) Searching: It satisfies looking for something the culture does not provide.
- e) Patience: produces more than character but inner strength.
- f) Self-Transcendence: Having experienced the goodness of God, nothing else will satisfy.
- g) Love: Posed by the boundless, unconditional love that even makes enemies friends.
- h) Communion: Our will conforms to God's and wishes nothing else by communion with Him

Please realize that this is a mere summary. I encourage everyone to read the entire book.

## Thoughts in Solitude *By Brother Richard Simonelli* Order of Sarada in America

As a contemplative who interacts with ordinary worldly life, I've noticed what interferes with or blocks my contemplative spirit. I feel like I'm riding a very spirited horse, frisky enough to throw me over and over again. But she's not a mean-spirited horse. After I'm thrown out of contemplation, the horse is usually waiting quietly for me to mount once again. I gradually begin to notice what can throw me.

**Distraction is the first challenge to contemplation** that I notice. Distraction means that the focus of my faith gets pushed aside by the speed and intensity of the world, or even by my own thoughts and emotions. The strong, simple sense of presence gets diverted by other calls on my attention.

**Occupation is yet another challenge to contemplation.** Occupation means that my inner life is taken over or occupied by concerns other than contemplation. I may be occupied by work-related issues, or by media reports of suffering and war. The many forms of occupation have one thing in common: I am taken over and lose the simple focus that brings joy, love, peace and clarity.


**Drama is a third impediment to the contemplative life.** When I let drama enter my psyche, I feel taken over by a kind of excitement that obscures the deep flow of contemplation. In drama, the mind and heart become possessed by a story line. It might be the drama of a personal relationship, or of personal issues. In any case, a dramatic mindset takes me away from the simple truth of contemplation. Intrigue often does the same thing. An inner condition of intrigue is full of cunning schemes to accomplish one thing or another. When intrigue blocks the state of contemplation life becomes devious and labyrinthine. The quality of simplicity is lost. In a mindset of intrigue deception and trickery are present.

**Indulging the brilliant mind is also a detour to contemplation.** In this case we get lost in the thinking process even though it is sharp and brilliant. We get diverted by an endless stream of thoughts, even though they are good and perhaps even productive thoughts. The contemplative then finds the self always thinking. Where, then, is the quality of contemplation?

**The passionate heart is also another challenge to a life of true contemplation.** The passionate heart is occupied with intense emotions or feelings. One passion after another pulls us in contradictory directions, leaving the one-pointed quality of contemplation nowhere to be found.

Now, it's not that we should not have brilliant minds or passionate hearts, but they can be so seductive that they replace the single-mindedness of contemplation with an endless rush of thoughts and feelings. They must be used in service to our deepest faith and not become a faith in and of themselves.

These diversions are not insurmountable problems for those committed to contemplation. In fact, awareness of any one of these conditions can be a sign of the contemplative's diligence. Rather than seeing these lapses as problems or enemies, they can be seen as reminders and messages. When this happens, these diversions will be taken in stride, contributing to our living peace. Contemplation is a commitment to simplicity. It is a stabilizing influence needed more than ever in busy, turbulent times. We need to become better, more alert riders of our inner horse of spirit and awareness.



# Five Stages of Spiritual Development

## Summarized and **red notes** by Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO

By articulating the stages and aspects of spiritual paths/journeys,  
those who walked them, assist current sojourners to

**UNDERSTAND**

**WHAT is occurring**

**WHEN s/he experiences/undergoes (are) those stages/aspects**

Model from M Benefiel.

The spiritual journey is about becoming more and more clear about God's will for oneself, here and now, at the present moment when I am alive.

The indwelling Holy Spirit, appropriates each individual in a distinctive and appropriate degree and manner and guides the individual into knowledge of the will of God in the here and now and for this daily life.

Understanding more and more the will of God for myself, I allow God's will to transform me, and my will and needs, my conditioned and uncritically received programs of happiness (satisfaction, security, survival, need for affection, approval, status, etc).

By this transformation one's capacity and determination to understand, perceive and grasp God's will for himself, in the here and now of the present moment/s of everyday life, he become more and more able, willing, determined, to follow, execute, realize, actualize and concretize God's will at every moment.

**A sincere traveler will always have a mentor and a Christian faith community. They will never go it alone. They will always choose a tried and true method not one of their own making.**

Continues on the next page.



*Our Abbot who has been praying earnestly over 50 years makes some comments. I like these Five Stages of Spiritual Development. They are simple, accurate and understandable. Benedict's twelve steps of Humility can overlap these stages. Similarly no one is ever just at one stage. Often we celebrate and mourn our spiritual development simultaneously.*

### Five Stages of Individual Spiritual Transformation

stage 1	stage 2	stage3	stage4	stage 5
awakening	transition	recovery	dark night	dawn
fullness	emptiness	fullness	emptiness	fullness

These stages are overlapping, elements of them can be present in the other stage - labeling them thus only points to the major characteristics of a particular stage.

#### Stage 1 AWAKENING - (experienced as, if,) FULLNESS

The individual becomes personally aware of (the need for) spiritual reality; Seeks for, tries out, adopts spiritual practices; Seeks connection with others (books, groups, relationships, correspondence, art..) on spiritual quest; Awareness of sacredness and giftedness of all activities, situations, everyday life, all discourses (cultural practices, sciences, arts, etc). *This is stage is an exciting experience. Much like the early experiences of a postulant or oblate. Often the individual's ego is unleashed and they begin to think that they have actually arrived and know it all. They become satisfied with self satisfaction and do not realize that a fall is about to follow.*

#### Stage 2 TRANSITION - EMPTINESS

Spiritual practices appear 'not working'; Disaffection with spiritual practices; Sense of isolation (e.g. previously valued authors, guides, groups/church, ideas, etc appear meaningless, personally irrelevant); Confusion; Question following (sense, relevance of) any spiritual path; Frustration.

*Stability, obedience, and conversatio and a patient mentor keep the "know it all" postulant or oblate from self deception. Prayer is NOT about self satisfaction. It is about lifting one's heart and soul to God. Moving from the bounds of this world to the freedom of heaven. Prayer is about giving your time, energy, and talents to God for His glory. There is no glory for the postulant or oblate. Prayer is about listening not blabbing.*

Continues on the next page.

## Continues

### Stage 3 RECOVERY (this may occur repeatedly and as an aspect of any stage) - FULLNESS

Discover new (apparently more meaningful) way of relating to ultimate reality (God, the meaning/purpose of life...); Adopt new spiritual practices; Connectedness with others (from the past, present, the ideas, works..) on spiritual path; Identity connected with personal transformation; Related awareness of daily sacredness. Renewed joy. Seeking and attaining of personal programs of spiritual feelings, need for affection, acceptance, approval, security, status, power, control - begin to be transformed into more mature spiritual attitudes (feelings of love are being transformed into 'spiritual' love, agape, dispassionate passion, compassion, charity etc.)

*Recovery often takes longer to arrive than one would wish. It is a good test of the depth of charity and courage of the postulant or oblate. Once recovery takes hold it is still filled with self satisfaction that can be easily destroyed. The fool hearty often believe that they have permanently arrived and become devastated when it crumbles.*

### Stage 4 Dark Night - EMPTINESS

Spiritual practices no longer yield transformation; Deeper core questions emerge; Sense of isolation; Deeper blocks to progress are manifested; 'deep abyss'; dryness, desert (this is part of all the stages); is this the end?'

*This is NOT the Dark Night of the Soul that some Saints have experienced. Nor is it a dryness that needs a time of rest, at the well. Rather it is one more visit into self will. The individual is resisting God's perfect will. The postulant or oblate is saying, "NO God, ME I want ME." This is a painful time. GOD IS NOT TESTING. RATHER THE INDIVIDUAL IS RESISTING.*

### Stage 5 DAWN - FULLNESS

Spiritual practices move beyond rote, conditioning, (mind) games, to feeling 'give' and responsive; Self gets relativized (no longer ego, self as center of the universe) to higher, altruistic good; sense of greater connectedness with other creatures and the rest of the universe; sense of alignment with greater force, (transcendent) power; new ways of making meaning emerge.

*This is an exciting experience. Seemingly the self has been happily destroyed and God has been allowed to take over. Soon enough the honest person will find self will and more broken humanity just underneath the shine. And so this process begins again. It is my hope that the more experienced novice, life professed and mature oblate will see this as a graced filled opportunity and rest themselves in the Lord and His definition of who they are.*

# Hopefully the older we get our wisdom becomes bolder.

by Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO, M.S., Ph.D., D.S.T.

Please note that my efforts to describe the purpose of and interaction between the body, soul, and spirit falls short of the totality of the interaction. We are more mystery than science or theology.

I feel that it is necessary to point out that whatever is negative or harmful to humankind is from original sin still operating, the devil, or our personal or corporate sins. God does NOT give, cause, or use evil for His purposes.

Seldom does God give us burdens of any kind to test us in any way. Yes, throughout history, including in Scripture. individuals have been tested by God for the purpose of providing that individual the opportunity to grow towards God. But note that these individuals already possess spiritual and emotional maturity. I believe that it is safe to say that most of us are not among these select few. Yes, we have said and have heard otherwise from the pulpit but I believe that this is our misguided way of avoiding responsibly for our own actions. Mostly we experience a sowing and reaping. That is not to say that through grace we cannot learn and overcome from our sowing and reaping.

We often mistake the enthusiasm of young Christians to mean spiritual and or emotional maturity. Those who have been around for a long time sometimes think that just “showing up” actually produces spiritual and emotional maturity. Some mistake a desire to do good, be good, and pray ten minutes a day will actually produce anything other than false pride.

God’s grace operates more like yeast than a lightning bolt. The road to Emmaus is more about the cross than moments of emotional self-satisfaction. The closer we become to God the more He seems to become unapproachable. The more we actually understand our worthlessness the more we want to approach Him. Yes, becoming a Christian is more a life journey of dying to self and becoming more intimate with the Divine.

It is difficult to say this but the truth is... not all churches are created equal. Those who hold the entire deposit of faith have more to offer its members. These churches are part of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic church founded by Christ Himself. If you do not understand what I just said then probably your church is not one of these. Please be a seeker of truth and search out these churches.

It is difficult to say that...God’s love is not unconditional, He does have favorites, He is merciful but He is also just, there is a real hell and the earth is not it. There is a heaven and knowing that should mean that we behave really differently than we do now.

It is difficult to say that... much of what we hear from the pulpit is founded in pop psychology and the narcissism of our human nature. For example the lie of self esteem, beliefs that we can control God, personal interpretation of Scripture, we can be Christians and not be intimately involved with a legitimate church, faith alone is enough we are not required to do holy works. I could go on and on. Again please be a truth seeker and do some research from credible sources.

Finally, our walk should lead to a profound understanding that everything is prayer, everything is God, and that we in, with, and through Him.

# We need to honor all of what we are to be truly spiritual.

Continued from previous page

## **Function, purpose and growth/destruction of the human body, soul, and spirit**

**Body** provides a corruptible material vehicle for the soul and spirit and can, with the help of Divine Grace, be drawn to God.

**Soul** is the non material and eternal character of the body, e.g., gender, intellect, free will, reason, personality, etc.

**Spirit** is non material and eternal. It gives life to the body/soul combination.

The body, soul, and spirit are affected by environment, family of origin, the individual's activities, e.g. religion, education, purposeful growth.

It is most helpful to see man as a triune person, meaning each part affects the other in both positive and negative ways. Below is a modest, although hopefully accurate, list of potentially positive and negative effects upon each body, soul, and spirit. I will list them in terms of the positive and negative elements acting upon the individual as they approach God in this world.

It is good to note that God can and does overcome all of our obstacles that can come between man and Himself.

### **Body:**

Positive effects upon: good mental and physical health, healthy life style, thriving emotional and physical environment, an active spirituality and community life, a healthy soul and spirit.

Negative effects upon: Psychiatric problems, lack of emotional stability, chronic illness, physical disabilities, diseases, destructive emotional or physical environment, little or no spirituality, and community involvement.

### **Soul:**

Positive effects upon: Include here the positive effects of the body as seen above. Additionally you might add education, purposeful emotional and spiritual growth and participation in a church, and social structure. The positive development of conscience, healthy intimate, and corporate relationships, a good sense of self including sexuality, problem solving, the ability to understand and appreciate non-material things such as ideas, music, the arts etc. This individual is more heavenly bound.

Negative effects upon: Include here the negative effect on body as seen above. Additionally you might add erroneous education, no or little emotional and spiritual growth and little or no participation in a church and social structure. Improper or no development of conscience, healthy intimate and corporate relationships, no or little healthy sense of self including sexuality, problem solving, little or no understanding and appreciate non-material things such as ideas, music, the arts etc. This individual is more earthly bound.

### **Spirit:**

Positive effects upon: I include here the positive effects upon both the body and soul. The following helps the spirit to grow and produce more life to the individual. For this person everything is spiritual, everything is prayer, everything is God. There is a focus on serving others, humility and meekness, exhibiting the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit. This individual has an invested prayer and church life, a Rule of Life, a spiritual director, and a confessor. This person studies the church fathers, history, and is a seeker of truth.

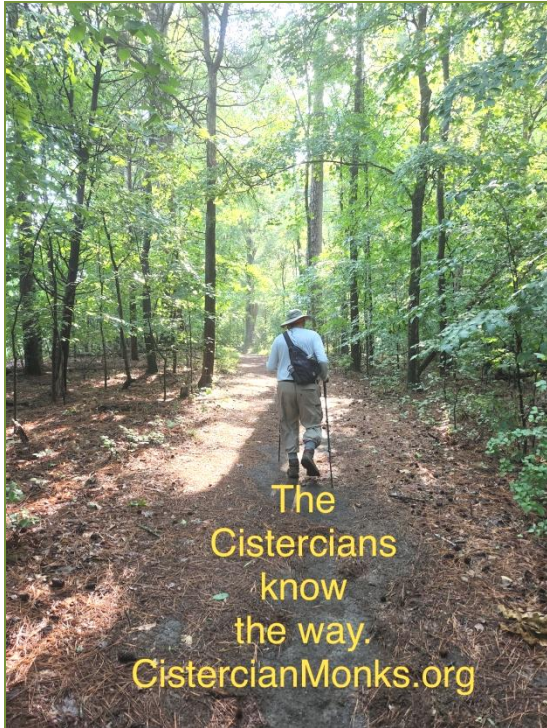
Negative effects upon: I include here the negative effects upon both the body and soul. The following hurts the spirit to grow and produce more life to the individual. For this person everything is about him/herself, what he/she can possess, and personal power, emphasis on negative feelings, self esteem, and status. There is little or no focus on serving others unless there is something in it for him/herself, and even at the expense of another's reputations etc. This individual believes that he/she is the judge on truth and will not submit to authority.





# Spiritual Joy

How to live and maintain a joy filled prayer life.  
By Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO



The  
Cistercians  
know  
the way.  
CistercianMonks.org

**A short video series**  
**Welcome to the Cistercian Order**  
**What is a Monk?**

**Where do we go from here?**  
(How to Maintain a Prayerful Life)

**The Rule of St. Benedict**  
**Habit of Prayers**

**Protecting your vocation**

**Perfectionism**  
(Gold Medal Monk)

**Lectio Divina**  
(Praying the Scriptures)

**Building Courage and Charity through Humility**

**Stability**  
**Obedience**  
**Conversatio**

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/9316848>

[https://youtube.com/channel/UC8n9vm\\_1zLZ72yIj2RoH2Vg](https://youtube.com/channel/UC8n9vm_1zLZ72yIj2RoH2Vg)



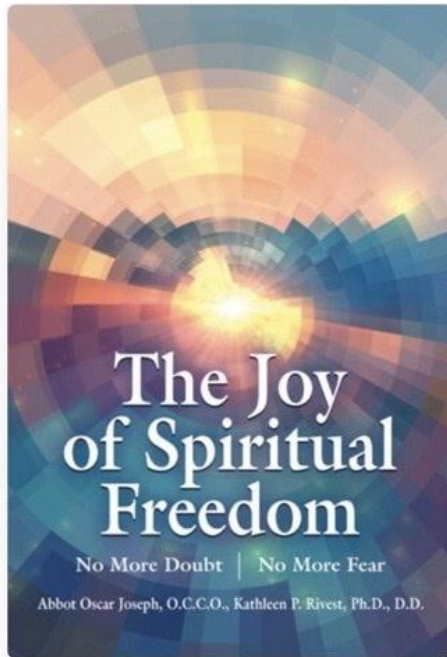
**Praying Unceasingly  
Problems and Solutions  
by Abbot Oscar Joseph, OCCO**

## **Contents**

1. The most important thing that you will ever do
2. The Real God is a God of love
3. Important Scriptures to remember
4. What is prayer?
5. Types of prayer
6. Lectio Divina
7. Why we should pray
8. List of Prayer books and Apps
9. What do I expect from prayer?
10. I want to see things as God sees things.
11. Dryness in prayer
12. God's love and our lack of trust
13. Biblical reasons for unanswered prayers
14. Prayer concerns
15. Spiritual direction
16. Reconciliation/Confession
17. Pray without ceasing
18. A Rule of Life
19. The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross

**Praying is the most important thing you can do.  
download your *free* Pdf version at:  
[www.AbbotOscarJoseph.com](http://www.AbbotOscarJoseph.com)**

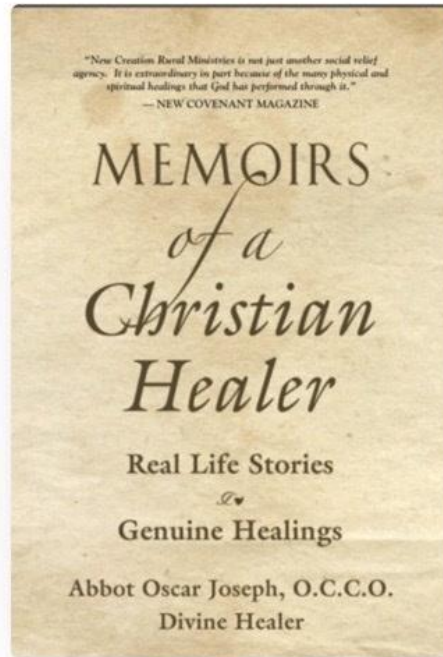




## The Joy of Spiritual Freedom

No More Doubts | No More Fear

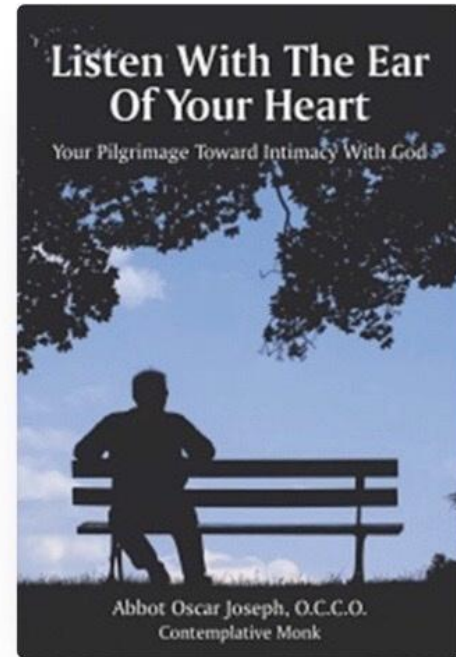
The Joy of Spiritual Freedom is the first of a trilogy that leads and inspires the reader to enter into a joy-filled relationship with a loving God. It is grounded in Biblical wisdom revealing how to remove debilitating doubt and fear. It draws from inspirational letters and case studies that illustrate the Gospel path toward freedom.



## Memoirs of a Christian Healer

Real Life Stories | Genuine Healings

Memoirs of a Christian Healer chronicles the miraculous works of God. You will experience the joy of victory and the sorrow of human weakness. Incorporated within the many stories the Abbot includes reflective lessons on the Healing Ministry. The many stories are of real people and genuine healings.



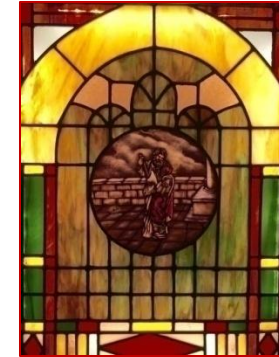
## Listen with the Ear of Your Heart

Your Pilgrimage Toward Intimacy with God

God created you to yearn for intimacy with Him. Listen with the Ear of Your Heart presents a dynamic pilgrimage utilizing Scripture, the teachings of the Church Fathers, The Rule of St. Benedict, prayer, meditation and contemplation.

**For more information and the FREE Companion books go to:  
[www.AbbotOscarJoseph.com](http://www.AbbotOscarJoseph.com)**

# CISTERCIAN ORDER OF THE HOLY CROSS, COMMON OBSERVANCE



**We serve men and women, clerical or lay, married or single by:**

*\*Helping them grow in perfection through the use of the Rule of St. Benedict, our Constitution, Manual and community life.\**

- 1. Consecrating to a religious life and live outside of a community*
- 2. Third order oblate program.*
- 3. Supporting men with a call to the diaconate and priesthood through ordination, or incardination*
- 4 Associates: Religious communities (residential or dispersed), jurisdictions, parishes, small or home based communities, or individual(s) who desire to be under our Abbatial and Episcopal oversight and be autonomous. (Visitors) Requirements can be flexible and dependent upon a group's or an individual's application.*

*“The Cistercian charism is a refuge for ardent lovers of God. The adherence to the Holy Rule of St. Benedict and focus on contemplating God in prayer is a precious balm on hearts aching for closer union with the Lord. The Cistercian Order of the Holy Cross is an opportunity for men or women to become a true monk or nun in this revered tradition.”*

**One doesn't enter the religious state because he is holy but because he wants to become holy.**

***For more information contact  
Abbot@bellsouth.net***