

**OBLATE RULE**  
**OF THE**  
**CAMALDOLESE**  
**BENEDICTINE MONKS**



**Emblem of the Camaldolese Benedictine Order**

We thank you for your interest in Camaldolese Benedictine Oblature. We ask you to read our short Oblate Rule in this booklet and meditate on it, pondering whether it can, with its basic guidelines and practices, help you in your spiritual journey.

We do not interpret the Oblate Rule as “written in stone,” but are ready to dialogue regarding possible personal modifications of one element or another. This because there is such diversity in our large Oblate family. For instance, some are retired and have much time for prayer, etc., whereas others might be raising families, very busy with jobs, etc. Some find the full Liturgy of the Hours to be particularly helpful, others less so, etc.

If and when it becomes apparent that you would like to begin the postulancy, please prepare a two-page spiritual autobiography indicating what it is about the Camaldolese charism and the Oblate Rule that calls you. This will be submitted to the Regional Chaplain for Australia and New Zealand Fr. Michael Mifsud. The document will also be passed onto a local Camaldolese Council Member for discernment.

At that point the one year postulancy period will be considered by the oblate chaplains. The main thing in that period is to practice living the Oblate Rule, pondering possible personal adaptations, so that at the end of the year you will have an experience of the real advantage to you, or not, of living daily by the Rule.

We hope that during this year period you will also familiarize yourself more thoroughly with our spiritual heritage through the suggested readings in this document.

Our Oblate family has grown to such an extent that it is unfortunately not possible for us to assume the ongoing responsibility for directing your spiritual growth. We do suggest a good director, and regular spiritual reading, and visits to our community and or other retreat facilities whenever possible.

# **Introduction to the Rule for Camaldolese Benedictine Oblates**

## **Adapted from the Camaldolese Constitutions**

Long before the coming of Christ, humanity's quest for the Absolute gave rise in various religious traditions to expressions of monastic life. The many different forms of monastic and ascetical life throughout the centuries bear witness to the divine destiny of the human person and to the presence of the Spirit in the hearts of all who seek to know what is true and ultimately real. There is a "monastic" dimension in every human life which the monk witnesses and affirms, just as every Christian call witnesses to that dimension present interiorly in every other Christian.

In the early Church, ascetics and virgins followed the Spirit's call to a more intense life of prayer. During the third and fourth centuries, with the exodus to the desert, Christian monasticism began to take on those forms of community life and solitude which would determine its later development. This tradition at its best always deeply esteemed marriage and single life in the world as ways to holiness in rich complementarity to monasticism.

Saint Benedict (d. circa 550), as author of the Rule for Monks, has always been considered the Western Church's lawgiver and master of monastic living. Saint Romuald (d. circa 1027) and his disciples (Camaldolese) also profess this rule.

The Rule of Saint Benedict is a synthesis of Christian spirituality including key elements of scripture and the fruit of the first centuries of monastic experience. Drawing on these directives, norms, and precepts found in the Gospel, the Rule wisely blends them with the historical and cultural context of its time. Thus the Rule of Saint Benedict unites the purity of timeless teachings and the characteristics of the author's own holiness and prudence with spiritual and juridical elements that are linked to his time and so are subject to modification as they are reinterpreted for each age.

Saint Romuald lived and worked during the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. He fully realized in his own life the spirit of the Rule, and he wisely reinterpreted it, emphasizing the solitude of the hermitage. Saint Romuald wanted the hermitage to be characterized by a greater simplicity and a more intense penitential and contemplative practice. Therefore he freely adapted some juridical and material structures of the cenobitic (communal) and anchoritic (hermit) life as they were lived before him, in order to respond to the spiritual needs of his contemporaries and to the "voice of the Holy Spirit, who presided over his conscience." (from *Life of Blessed Romuald* by Saint Peter Damian, #53). The Camaldolese hermitage is a special fruit of Saint Romuald's broad and varied monastic experience as a reformer and founder. The hermitage retains elements of cenobitic (communal) living, at the same time offering the possibility of greater solitude and freedom in the inner life.

The Camaldolese Congregation (of the Order of Saint Benedict) takes its name from the Holy Hermitage of Camaldoli, founded by Saint Romuald. Quite early on, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the congregation was formed with the founding or aggregation of other hermitages and monasteries. Today those include, besides New Camaldoli and Incarnation Monastery, several ancient houses in Italy, and foundations in India, Brazil and Tanzania. There are Camaldolese nuns in the United States, Italy, France, India, Tanzania and Brazil. Our congregation looks to Saints Benedict and Romuald with filial devotion and regards our holy teachers' doctrine and spirit as perennially valid. Today as in the past, the Holy Hermitage of Camaldoli (Italy) is considered to be the head and mother of the

congregation. For each age the Rule of Saint Benedict is interpreted by the Camaldolese Constitutions and the entire Camaldolese tradition.

In both the hermitages and monasteries which characterize Camaldolese life, the monks attend to the contemplative life above all else, which is seeking and communing with God in a very deep way throughout one's daily life by a sharing in the Paschal mystery of Christ.

New Camaldoli (Immaculate Heart), Big Sur, CA was founded from the Holy Hermitage of Camaldoli, Italy, in 1958. New Camaldoli's daughter house, Incarnation Monastery, Berkeley, CA was founded in 1979. Incarnation Monastery is also the seat of the Saint Benedict Monastic Institute and serves as the house of studies for New Camaldoli.

Camaldolese Benedictine Oblates are a group of Christians who experience an attraction of the Holy Spirit to deep prayer and experience a bond of friendship with our monastic community and its long spiritual tradition. In fact friendship is an important value cherished by the Camaldolese family and therefore encouraged between monks and those living outside our houses. Oblates are extended members of the Camaldolese Benedictine family, seeking to share, in their own special way, in its way of living the Christian life. To this end, the Rule of Saint Benedict, the Camaldolese Constitutions and the rich and ancient Camaldolese tradition want to be adapted to the life of oblates living their own Christian vocation. For both monks and oblates, the heart of our life is the seeking of God, the following of Christ's twofold command of love in the natural rhythms of daily life. Scripture, Liturgy of the Eucharist and the Hours, silence, solitude, deep interior prayer of quiet, work, shared life with others—these are the means which enable us to seek and find God with a pure heart. The oblate faces the challenge of setting up his/her own structure of life animated by key elements of the Camaldolese charism in order to live and grow in the life of Christ. Of course active participation in the local Christian community remains important for rootedness in the Christian life. Oblate spirituality seeks above all else a loving union with God

through a full, prayerful life; a life which is at the same time both deeply interior and outwardly expansive in love and service of neighbor. It is a spirituality which is particularly nurtured through solitude and silence as well as through warm community.

The Rule for Oblates attempts to take the principal elements of the Camaldolese charism and apply them in general to the life of oblates without many of the structures of life here at the Hermitage. It is up to each oblate, according to the circumstances of their life, to set up their own structures for living the basic elements of Camaldolese spirituality, which are rooted simply in the Christian Gospel.

## **PRAYER**

God the Father has chosen us in the Son and has predestined us to be adopted children of God. For with the Son we have died and have been risen up in baptism, so that we might receive “a spirit of adoption through which we cry out ‘Abba’ (that is, ‘Father’)” (Romans 8,15). It is God’s Spirit who enables us to persevere in steadfastness of faith and who inwardly strengthens us, so that in Christ we may stand with confidence before God.

Nourished by the Body and Blood of Christ and transformed into Him, we live in the hope that God’s loving plan for us will be fulfilled. Consecrated by the Holy Spirit, who forms us into a spiritual temple and a holy priesthood, we are called to offer our lives to God as a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable through Christ. Thus we become true worshipers and we exercise fully our priestly role, united in the Church’s sacraments to Christ’s own offering of His life to God.

As sincere seekers of God (Rule of Benedict 58,7) we approach God as sons and daughters. We center our lives on the encounter with God, which finds expression in forms of prayer handed down in early Christian, patristic and monastic traditions. Ultimately, our prayer seeks to become the very prayer of the Holy Spirit within our hearts.

## **A. Liturgy of the Eucharist**

“The Liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows” (Vatican II Constitution on Liturgy). The paschal mystery of Christ is made present and effective for our salvation in the celebration of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the center of the life of the Church because from it the Church is born, lives and continues to grow until she is ready to meet her bridegroom Christ as He comes in glory.

The sharing in God’s life and the unity of God’s people are in fact given fitting expression and a mysterious realization in the Eucharist, in which the Church, made one with the sacrifice of Christ, offers herself to God. In the Eucharist the Church receives an outpouring of the Holy Spirit and enjoys a foretaste of the perfect communion with the Blessed Trinity which will be hers in the age to come.

The life of the oblate should be oriented in such a way that it is a preparation for, and an extension of, the eucharistic action. The Eucharist should be celebrated at least once a week and in as full, conscious and active a way as possible. Thus, by God’s gift , the oblate may attain that total inner openness to God’s action which the spiritual masters have called mystical experience or contemplation.

## **B. Liturgy of the Hours**

As Camaldolese Benedictines, we have always considered the celebration of the praise of God to be a fundamental element in our life. In the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, the Church offers her sacrifice of praise to the Father, and she thanks God for the salvation that comes to her in Christ. In the Hours, as in the Eucharist, Christ is acting out his priestly role and bringing to completion the covenant of love that unites bride to her bridegroom.

According to Christian tradition, the purpose of the Liturgy of the Hours is the sanctification of the entire day. Hence it is necessary

that the celebration of the various Hours (Vigils, Lauds, Vespers, Compline, etc.) correspond as closely as possible to their proper time of day. Special importance should be given to Lauds (at daybreak) and Vespers (at sunset), the principal moments of the Liturgy of the Hours. Though we are aware of time pressures for so many, these two hours are recommended for oblates if possible. Each element of the Hours—the psalms, hymns, scripture, prayers—is to have its proper place in the celebration. The Hours are enhanced when prayed slowly and reverently and when accompanied by scripture study and a deeper understanding of the psalms.

### **C. Lectio Divina**

Lectio Divina (divine or holy reading) is a principal practice of our spirituality. True to its biblical origins, the monastic life seeks above all a listening heart wherein God’s Word—God’s self-communication—is made manifest in Christ, in the Scriptures, in the human heart and in the heart of the cosmos. Lectio Divina is a method of approaching scripture in order to listen to the depths, seeking to encounter Christ, the Word, through the power of the Holy Spirit, hidden in the words of the text. Ultimately it can be said that the goal of lectio is an ever expanding capacity to listen with the heart to the Word of God in all of life’s situations, leading to a more constant awareness of God’s presence. It is a listening as communication not so much for a particular message but for the nearness of the Living God. It is therefore a listening that leads to a new way of seeing. In this sense the faithful practice of lectio undergirds our entire life of prayer, work, and communion with others.

The traditional method for Lectio Divina is fourfold:

- 1. Lectio:** The repeated reading of the text until certain words and phrases call for attention. Sometimes footnotes in a good study bible (for example, the Jerusalem Bible) as well as cross references help here. This stage has often been compared to taking in food, as the first “eating” of the word of scripture.

**2. Meditatio:** The further “chewing” or ruminating on key words and phrases. One stays as long as one is so attracted to a word or phrase. At this stage the heart of the text for the reader should begin to emerge.

**3. Oratio:** These key words and phrases of the text eventually lead the person to prayer inspired by the text and a growing awareness of God’s presence in Christ by the Spirit. This is the deep tasting of the text.

**4. Contemplatio:** Eventually the particular words lead the reader beyond words to a silent awareness of God’s presence—simply an abiding or communing with God. This is the savoring of the sweetness of the Lord.

Lectio is also enhanced when an oblate does scripture study and learns to consult good commentaries to support his or her reading. In this way the subtle nuances of a text will be more available to the reader. The oblate should try to do lectio as often as possible but at least once a week in preparation for Sunday Liturgy, using the readings for that Sunday.

**Interior Prayer:** Personal participation in the liturgy and the regular practice of lectio are reflected in one’s interior prayer, flowing up from the depths of the heart under the influence of the Holy Spirit. This “secret” prayer, the fruit of repentance and purity of heart, is taught by the Gospel and recommended by Saint Benedict, Cassian and the desert tradition. The atmosphere of silence, in which God speaks, is indispensable for this practice. Silence permeates it and nourishes it, and when an oblate is faithful to this prayer (Jesus Prayer/Centering Prayer/Christian meditation, etc.) it becomes a constant reality in his/her relationship with God as son/daughter. It is recommended that this prayer be offered twice a day, morning and evening, for ten or twenty minutes or more, when possible. This prayer gradually becomes expansive, embracing more and more of our day and ourselves as we become aware of God’s continual abiding presence, even at work, during traffic jams and those brief moments of pause interspersing our day. Be attentive and

open to the voice of the Spirit, knowing that prayer is her gift. Continually ask for this grace; and as you long to take part in the Church's mystical marriage with her spouse the Lamb, allow the Spirit to draw you into the silent state of the heart called quies or (rest, stillness), there to experience your own mystical union with God. It is important to model your whole spiritual life on the mystery of Christ, following the Church on her journey throughout the annual liturgical cycle. Find the best way of entering into and celebrating as intensely as possible the principal seasons of the Christian year—Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter.

## **ASCETICISM/DISCIPLINE**

The Church shares in the mystery of Christ her head, which is a mystery of death and resurrection. Sealed by the Spirit, “the pledge of our inheritance”, the Church longs for the fulfillment of God’s kingdom as she awaits “Our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 1,4/Titus 2,13). Monks and oblates humbly welcome the word that has taken root in them, with its power to save, and they strive to be continually converted by that word and to be doers of the word and not merely listeners. All Christians strive to follow the poor, chaste and obedient Christ according to the particular circumstances of their lives. This means lives that are marked by simplicity, sharing, chaste loving and continual surrender to God’s desire for them and the world. Oblates seek to undertake those ascetic disciplines necessary for their life in the world as extended members of the New Camaldoli and Incarnation Monastery. The daily dying to selfishness, to control, to possessiveness, to activism, to addictions and anything else that hinders the oblate’s transformation in Christ is the basic asceticism. A life of moderation, integration, focus, wholeness, and depth must be sought through whatever practices help in this regard (i.e. fasting, retreats, good spiritual reading, spiritual direction). Moderating the use of television, media, alcohol, etc., would also be helpful forms of asceticism.

## **WORK**

A great deal of our lives is spent at work. For our spirituality, work is more than earning a living. It is a means of developing our human faculties, continuing the work of God the Creator and contributing to the fulfillment of the plan of Divine Providence. Sometimes work also entails some suffering, and to this extent it is for us a participation in the redemption of humanity through the mystery of the cross. Work develops our skills and talents as well as offering a means through which we can contribute to the betterment of society. Work also enables us to acquire material goods and thereby to share with those less fortunate than we. Work can also be an expression of God's beauty and loving care for this earth. Oblates should seek to make their work an integral part of their spirituality, uniting themselves with God who in Christ is working in the world in order to bring all things into unity. Work is also a necessary part of our Christian dignity, expressing outwardly in doing our very being as sons and daughters of a loving creator God. Work does not define who we are but rather gives expression in an incarnational way to who we are as well as mysteriously expanding our very being in God.

## **SILENCE AND SOLITUDE**

Silence and solitude have a privileged place in the Camaldolese Benedictine tradition. The encounter with God in silence and solitude is distinctive of our tradition. An apt image of such an encounter with God is the desert or wilderness, where one is stripped of everything but that alone which is truly necessary. Oblates find the Hermitage at Big Sur, CA, to be in many ways a desert/ wilderness experience of silence and solitude supported by community. While this might remain hard to duplicate precisely, oblates should nevertheless cherish such silence and solitude, seeking creative ways of finding them in their daily lives. It is especially important to seek for silence and solitude of the heart, which can be found everywhere if one has learned how to remain in vital contact with the depths. Of course oblates should periodically spend time away on retreat. Some time at the Hermitage or at Incarnation Monastery in Berkeley, CA, if possible.

## OTHER INFORMATION FOR OBLATES

1. There is a minimum six months period of postulancy followed by a further minimum six month novitiate. During this time an oblate candidate carefully reads and prays over this rule to see; how well it “fits”, and to discern the Spirit’s movement in the candidate’s life. At the end of this period, the candidate should notify the oblate chaplain if oblation is desired. There is a formal ceremony for the reception of an oblate which ideally would take place at the Hermitage or at Incarnation Monastery. However, in order to accommodate those not able to come to either of the Camaldolese houses, the ceremony can take place at a local monastery or church. During the ceremony (see Appendix A) a medallion with our ancient emblem is given to the new oblate. Once received, the oblate is placed on the New Camaldoli and Camaldolese Community of Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand mailing lists for quarterly newsletters, along with recommendations of books and other teaching media. The newsletters, besides providing a meditation on some aspect of our spirituality, also keep the oblate informed about life at the Hermitage, Incarnation Monastery and the community in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand. Special events for oblates are also announced in the newsletters.
2. The oblate is asked to write or meet at least once a year with the oblate chaplain as a means of keeping contact and just letting him know how one is doing living the oblate rule. If for any reason the oblate wishes to discontinue in this relationship with us, we would appreciate being notified.
3. Oblates are continually remembered in the prayer of the Camaldolese community and of course always welcome at any of our houses. When we are notified of the death of an oblate, the Eucharist is offered as soon as possible for the deceased in the Camaldolese community to which the oblate is affiliated.

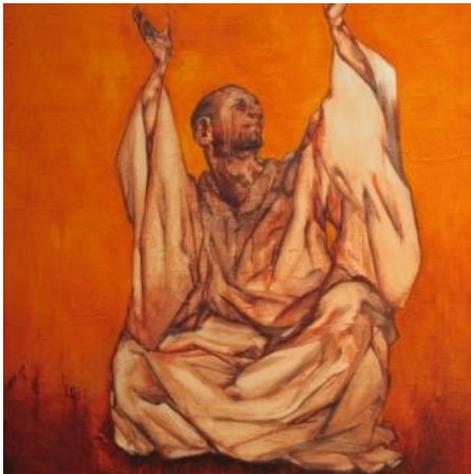
4. Oblates are encouraged to adapt the rule to the particular circumstances of their lives in consultation with the oblate chaplain.

## PRAYERS

Heavenly Father, you have bound us together, monks and oblates, in the love of your Son Jesus Christ, Bless us in the prayer and work which you have given us to do, so that by the strength of your Spirit we may contribute, to the advancement of your kingdom, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Heavenly Father, you so filled your servant St. Romuald with your creative Spirit that he became a powerful force in Your Church for the renewal of Christian solitary and communal life. Fill us with the same Spirit, so that we may live, whether in solitude or community, intent upon Your service and praise.

This we ask through Christ our Lord. Amen.



# APPENDIX A



## THE ADMISSION OF A CAMALDOLESE BENEDICTINE OBLATE

### Rite of Oblation

(The rite takes place after the Gospel.)

**Celebrant:** Friends In Christ, NN are requesting to become Oblates of New Camaldoli Hermitage USA and of the Australian and NZ Camaldolese Oblate Family. Let us receive their request made with faith in our Lord Jesus

What do you desire?

**Oblate:** I desire to seek God, and to live the Gospel of Jesus more deeply.

**Celebrant:** What do you ask of the Camaldolese Benedictine Family?

**Oblate:** I ask to follow together with you as an Oblate of New Camaldoli Hermitage USA and of the Australian and NZ Camaldolese Oblate Family, in the steps and spirit of St. Romuald: in his love for solitude, silence and simplicity, by deepening my prayer, hospitality and service to those in need.

**Celebrant:** Have you considered the commitments of the Oblate Rule, and is it your intention to live by that rule?

**Oblate:** I have, and with Gods help, I intend to live by the Oblate's Rule,

**Celebrant:** *(to all Present)* You have heard NN affirm their commitment. Will all of you here who have witnessed this commitment support them with your prayer?

**All:** We will, with God's help.

**Celebrant:** In the name of the Camaldolese Benedictine community I receive you into the family of Camaldolese Benedictine Oblates of New Camaldoli Hermitage USA and of the Australian and NZ Camaldolese and pledge our prayers and support.

**Celebrant:** Almighty Father,  
you have bound us together, monks and oblates,  
in the love of your Son Jesus Christ.  
Strengthen us in the prayer and work  
which you have given us to do,  
so that by the power of your Holy Spirit,  
we may contribute to the advancement of your  
Kingdom, through Christ our Lord.

**All:** Amen.

**Celebrant:** The blessing of God Almighty, the Father. Son,  
and Holy Spirit, be upon you and remain with you  
always.

**All:** Amen.

**Celebrant:** Let us welcome NN into the Camaldolese  
Benedictine family.  
*(At this point the sign of peace is exchanged).*



## APPENDIX B

# SAINT ROMUALD'S BRIEF RULE

Sit in your cell as in paradise:  
put the whole world behind you and forget it.

Like a skilled angler on the lookout for a catch, keep a careful eye on  
your thoughts.

The path you must follow is in the Psalms—never leave it. If you've  
come with a novice's enthusiasm and can't accomplish everything  
you want, take every chance you can find to sing the Psalms in your  
heart and to understand them with your head; if your mind wanders  
as you read, don't give up but hurry back and try again.

Above all realize that you are in God's presence, hold your heart  
there in wonder as if before your sovereign.

Empty yourself completely.

Sit waiting, content with God's gift, like a little chick tasting and  
eating nothing but what its mother brings.

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*Saint Romuald's Brief Rule is taken from Saint Bruno of Querfurt's  
Lives of the Five Brothers (Chapter nineteen). It was written around  
AD 1006—about twenty years before Saint Romuald's death - and is  
based on reports from Saint John, one of the "five brothers", who,  
like Saint Bruno, knew Saint Romuald well. We can therefore be  
certain we have here an authentic version of Saint Romuald's  
teaching and spirit.*

# APPENDIX C

## THE CAMALDOLESE EMBLEM

The Camaldolese emblem, which in its own way sums up our spirituality, is very ancient, predating our Order. It can be found, in interesting variations, in the Ravenna church mosaics, in the catacombs of Rome and even in non-Christian art. It thus has an “archetypal” depth and power. The Camaldolese form includes the chalice and cross at the center, representing Christ in our midst, especially in his paschal and eucharistic presence. The peacocks, ancient symbols of eternal life, represent the community of faith being nourished from the life of Christ. In their twofold presence they can represent the solitary and the communal dimensions of Camaldolese monasticism (the hermitage and the cenobium), and they can also stand for the monk and the oblate united in the one nourishing experience of Christ.

This variation of the emblem below indicates our motto, “I am yours, you are mine”, which sums up the biblical experience of covenant boundedness with God, also in its culminating image of spousal love, expressed in the Canticle and expressed by contemplatives down through the ages. The motto is presented in the three languages of

Greek, Latin and English to express the universality of God’s call to union in love.

The emblem in its simplest form is represented on the oblate medallion, and can thus be an ongoing reminder of our call to union with Christ, and thus with one another, in the bonding love of his life poured out for all.



# APPENDIX D

## RECOMMENDED READING

The following books are recommended (but not required!) for those candidates discerning Oblature, and for Oblates as they continue their spiritual journey.

Above all the Holy Bible, read meditatively and prayerfully. We recommend the NRSV translation, but there are now several splendid translations available.

Then, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, also available in various translations and editions. We recommend the “RB 1980” translation, in either its larger format, with splendid introductions, notes, indices, or the smaller, pocket edition.

Then, *The Privilege of Love: Camaldolese Benedictine Spirituality*, Edited by Peter-Damian Belisle (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2002). This very helpful volume consists of various articles written by our own Camaldolese monastics; the chapter on “The Camaldolese Oblate Program,” co-authored by a lay Oblate woman, is particularly helpful.

Then, *Camaldoli: A Journey into its History and Spirituality* by Lino Vigilucci (California: Source Books, 1995). Fr. Vigilucci, now deceased, was the Order’s historian and traced in this book the long, rich Camaldolese tradition. There is a helpful Glossary in the back.

Then, *The Mystery of Romuald and the Five Brothers: Stories from the Benedictines and Camaldolese* by Fr. Thomas Matus (California: Source Books, 1994). The book includes Fr. Matus’ translation of two early Camaldolese classic texts: *The Life of Blessed Romuald* by St. Peter Damian and *The Life of the Five Brothers* by St. Bruno of Querfurt, one of the first disciples of St. Romuald, as well as Fr. Matus’ own Camaldolese experience and reflection.

Then, *Love on the Mountain: The Chronicle Journal of a Camaldolese Monk* by Fr. Robert Hale (California: Source Books, 1999). The book offers a glimpse into the day-to-day life of the Hermitage monks, and reflections on Camaldolese spirituality.

# PERSONAL NOTES



## The Camaldolese Oblate Community of Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand

<https://camaldolesedownunder.wordpress.com/>

In Australia our points of contact are the nearest member of the Council to your location.

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