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## Monastic Voice

### *Some aphorisms of Fr.Francis Mahieu O.C.S.O.*

#### **Obedience & Acceptance**

... The beginning of the mystical life in us begins with the realisation that all our previous sufferings were actually times of blessings.

...We should learn and accept the alternation of trials and blessings in our life, and not wait only for blessings.

...The labour of obedience, similar to the labour of childbirth, involves our whole being because of the opposition of our self-will.

...Do not despair. Put your trust in God that He may pull you up and move you onwards by favourable winds.

...When darkness falls upon us (as when the electricity fails), we have to stop and perhaps re-orient ourselves.

...Obedience is a battle; it may also be called a weapon. Sadly, the nobility of weapons has been lost because of today's missiles.

...Suffering is the manure and water necessary for a good harvest.

...Obedience is a delicate virtue by nature, but very powerful in practice.

...Self-control is the narrow gate through which we enter the way of life.

...Constant struggle is necessary to maintain the fruits of the Spirit in us.

...An intelligent head on a sickly body is no good. We should transcend our weaknesses and rise to the quality of the Head, Christ.

...Baptism may be called a 'branding' to indicate that we belong to the flock of Jesus.

...Even when we recite a lot of prayers, we are not praying if we do our own will.

...Harmony is a result of surrender.

### **Prayer In Our Communities**

We can't become angels, but we can imitate them in praising God unceasingly.

...Do not separate prayer and doctrine.

...The heavenly liturgy is actuated in us by the liturgy of the Church 'in anticipation'.

...The prayer of the Church actuates the Redemptive

Mysteries, just as the generator gives electricity to a bulb.

...The heart of the life of the Church is the celebration of the Economy of Salvation.

...The word of God 'penetrates between soul and spirit', \* not to separate them but to make them work hand in hand. (\* St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 4:12)

...The prayer of the Church alternates between speaking to God and listening to God.

...We should pray for the restoration of the sense of Sunday as the Lord's day.

...In my opinion, the theology found in the prayer of the Church is even deeper than what is taught in seminaries.

**FROM THE OBLATEMASTER'S DESK:**-Francis Acharya, well-known in Indian monastic circles as one of the forerunners of the Christian Ashram Movement, crossed over to the Promised Land on January 31, 2002. His life, a saga which began on the 17th of January, 1912, in Belgium, the land of Missionaries, came to an end in India, the abode of Maharshis. He was ninety, "Our span is seventy years, or eighty for those who are strong" says the psalmist (Ps. 90:10). "Ninety for those who are stronger," one is tempted to add! A true Indian sannyasi with a multi-faceted personality, he was "still bearing fruit when old, still full of sap, still green" (Ps. 92:14).

### **Early days and vocation**

John Mahieu (who, in time, became Francis Acharya) was the fifth son of a prosperous farmer. After schooling and business studies at Brussels, divine providence brought him to London. While there, his latent spiritual senses were awakened and captivated by Gandhiji, the so-called "half-naked fakir," who had arrived there for the round-table conference. The Mahatma's apparent holiness and commitment to personal values struck a chord in John's heart, a chord which was but a foreshadowing of the spiritual symphony which would soon follow.

John served in the Belgian army from 1932 to '33, when the Finger of the Lord beckoned him to His ranks to fight a new kind of warfare, an unseen and interior one this time. He left the army after a period of profound pondering, entered the Trappist (Cistercian) monastery of

Our Lady of Scourmont at Chimay, Belgium, taking the name Francis. He had chosen that particular monastery because its Abbot, Dom Anselm le Bail, a reformer and visionary in his own right, was planning to establish a foundation in India, the land of Mahatma Gandhi. **He served as novice-master there from 1946 to '49 and later at Caldey Abbey in Great Britain.** (*Note from the Oblatemaster--The modern day Iona*)

Scourmont later dropped its plans for an Indian foundation and after twenty years as a Trappist monk and priest with degrees from Rome, Louvain and Paris under his belt, Fr. Francis found himself alone as he set sail for India to join two like-minded Frenchmen. These were Henri le Saux (Swamy Abhishiktananda), a Benedictine monk and Fr. Jules Monchanin (Swamy Paramarubi Ananda), a missionary priest. They had already founded Saccidanada Ashram (Shantivanam) near Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu.

### **Kurisumala Ashram**

The months immediately following Fr. Francis' landing at Bombay in July 1955 were pilgrim days for him as he traversed the length and breadth of India, assimilating the culture and traditions of this 'cradle of monasticism'. His stay at Shantivanam with its founders lasted a year. Following an invitation by Zacharias Mar Athanasius, then Bishop of Tiruvalla diocese in Kerala, he soon decided to sink roots there. On March 21, 1958 he established Kurisumala Ashram (the 'Syrian Shantivanam,' as Fr. Monchanin put it) near Vagamon,

Kerala, in the company of **Fr. Bede Griffiths**, (stayed at **Pluscarden--note Oblatemaster**) well-known Benedictine monk, and a couple of aspirants.

Their lifestyle during the first days at Kurisumala was rigorous and simple in the extreme. Whatever the essential commodities they lacked, water was certainly not one of them! Monsoon rains lashed the mountainside with such fury that they soon realized the inadequacy of their thatched hut in checking the onslaught of humidity and the need of a stone building. Fr. Francis loved to recall how their primitive living conditions had brought tears to the eyes of their visiting Bishop who once actually told them: “If I were free, I’d immediately join you!”

Enveloped by the elements in the shadow of the cross, this small nucleus grew into a koinonia of fifteen in three years under the watchful eyes of Fr. Francis who was their father, mother, confidant and guru. Of the scenic beauty of Kurisumala’s surroundings, he wrote:

This joyous site of rocks and hills,  
The sparkling jewels of the highlands of Kerala,  
A land of grassy slopes with flowers of many hues,  
With glades where fair trees dance in the wind...

By dint of back-breaking labour which is the lot of pioneers, they transformed this beautiful but infertile tract of land into a veritable paradise of green pastures, flower-gardens, and vegetable beds. Acharya’s search for a livelihood and his concern for the welfare of the needy

people nearby led to the establishment of Kurisumala dairy farm. This agricultural development and cattle-breeding facilities soon gave Kurisumala the image of the promised land to many. Their daily life was woven out of three distinctive strands:

**Syrian Liturgy:** An oriental and essentially poetic liturgy deeply rooted in the thought and language of the Bible, with a vivid sense of the resurrection.

**Indian Monastic Lifestyle:** Inculturated, simple, nature-oriented and austere.

**Benedictine-Cistercian Spirituality:** Based on the Rule of Saint Benedict with its emphasis on community prayer, manual labour and *Lectio Divina* (meditative, prayerful spiritual reading).

Modeling their life on the early Church of Jerusalem, they lived the common life to the hilt, sharing living quarters, basic amenities and goods. Prayer services were initially in Syriac. Fr. Francis, driven by the typical Cistercian search for authenticity, traveled all the way to Iraq and managed to procure original Syriac prayers of the Antiochean rite (the *Penqito*). By a Herculean effort spanning nearly two decades, he translated selected portions into four volumes totaling 2300 pages, named *Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit*. "...He has freely used his sources with striking effect, reflecting the Christian freedom and creative genius of the great masters of liturgical prayer in the past" wrote *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* of the Pontifical Oriental Institute. Rome,

praising the first of this quartet, adorned as it is with ‘seeds of the word’ gleaned from the spiritual heritage of India. A book of daily readings on the Lives and Saying of Saints from different religious traditions, a lectionary with commentary for the liturgical feasts of the year, a translation of the Ritual of the Clothing of Monks in the Syrian tradition and some other unpublished works were also born of his fecund pen. Besides these, he took active interest and published Malayalam translations of those gems of Eastern Christian monastic spirituality, *The Philokalia* and *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.

Immersed in the regular monastic milieu of prayer, work, and spiritual reading, this small band of sadhakas, brahmacharis and sannyasis continued to cross milestones: Fr. Francis’ Indian citizenship, Fr. Bede’s departure to Shantivanam as its superior, Fr. Francis’ Shashtiabdapurthi and his taking up the title of “Acharya,” introduction of the Bharatiya Pooja... Ever the able and concerned Captain, he piloted Kurisumala Ashram back to the Cistercian shore towards the end of his earthly voyage, and it was thus that Kurisumala was incorporated “as it is” into the Cistercian Order of Strict Observance in July 1998, with the status of Abbey. The title of ‘Abbot’ was conferred on him a year later, just before the Cistercian General Chapter at Lourdes, where he was the doyen—and the babe, in another sense! Little wonder, then that his twilight days were brightened by an ever-radiant face that spoke volumes of his inner joy and contentment of having run a good race. When a heart-failure transported him from time to eternity, the first



words he heard must surely have been, “Well done, good and faithful servant...”

His body was transferred to Pushpagiri Hospital, Tiruvalla, where it was on display for four days in a glass-sided mortuary, only a stone’s throw away from the Bishop’s home where he and Fr. Bede had begun their lives as sannyasis before setting out for Kurisumala. Another remarkable coincidence was the location of the former pilgrimage shrine at the Ashram where his mortal remains were finally laid to rest—it was right next to the site where they had set up their first hut and began life at Kurisumala. These curious coincidences of beginning and ending at the same place—could they perhaps be signs that he did return straight to the embrace of the Heavenly Father from where he began his earthly pilgrimage?

### **Francis Acharya the Man**

Fr. Francis Acharya was a man whose personality had many sides to it. A man of short stature but a giant in his faith and resolve, he rubbed shoulders with patriarchs to peasants, and became “all things to all people” in a real sense. He was a loving son to his parents, a genuine monk to his fellow cenobites, a man of verve and vision to his contemporaries, a spiritual father par excellence to his sons at Kurisumala and many others, a gracious host to all who visited his Ashram, an unsung up-lifter of the poor in Vagamon, a true Gandhian to all Indians, an inspiration to many and, it must be admitted, a thorn in the flesh to some. His strict and unyielding ways

occasionally rubbed people the wrong way, especially during his early days at Kurisumala. Sometimes it was misunderstanding that caused problems. “It is puzzling to see how the best intentions, how works of dedication almost invariably arouse suspicions and opposition in one’s own circles and in other circles” said Fr. Francis once during an interview. The Lord, in course of time, smoothed the rough edges of His chosen instrument on the grindstone of adversities and physical sufferings, so that sweetness and charm emanated from him towards the end, with only an occasional overcast to remind others of his garam masaala days. “Father Francis yesterday and Father Francis today are as far apart as night and day” was how a senior Sannyasi put it. And so it was with heavy hearts and brimming eyes that the brothers of Kurisumala gathered around the death-bed of their beloved Father, realizing that he had come a full circle: from quick-tempered to serene, from demanding to understanding, from stubborn to docile.

He is no longer with us in the flesh and blood, but his spirit lives on in the living tradition of Kurisumala Ashram, in the daily celebrations from Prayer with the Harp of the Spirit and in the hearts of the poor folk of Vagamom in a special way.

### **Books and Media**

**"Kurisumala: Father Francis Mahieu Acharya: A Pioneer of Christian Monasticism in India"**( Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2008 We are just reading this in the refectory--very gripping! paperback ISBN 10:

0879076143 ISBN 13: 9780879076146 Publisher: Cistercian Publications, 2008 from your library or equivalent of US\$ 29-used-ish Marte Mahieu-De Praetere --author Synopsis Francis Mahieu, a middle-aged Trappist monk, arrived in India in 1955, intent, like his companions Jules Monchanin, Henri Le Saux, and Bede Griffiths, on living a Christian monastic life in the land where the monastic tradition had first taken root. More than a biography, Kurisumala is an account of the evolution of a monastic life which is both authentically Christian and authentically Indian. Includes an eight-page photograph insert in colour.

**PLUSCARDEN BENEDICTINES** Br. Cyprian Bampton is the new editor. All enquiries about the magazine that so many of you enjoy to him, please. £10 is a suggested subscription donation. For inclusion on the mailing list write Br. Cyprian Bampton OSB at the Abbey address -- **similarly subscriptions and changes of address to him, Br. Cyprian.** The magazine gives you the news of the Abbey-- like the name of the new GARDEN cat-- this, the **Oblate** Letter-- just gives a little thought from the Oblatemaster and some bulletin and prayer points nothing more. Both are quarterly, usually the third month of each quarter.

**PLUSCARDEN LIVE STREAMING--go to our website and you will find a drop-down list leading you to livestreaming-- click onto that and choose past or present item. Br. Michael is in charge of the live streaming. All queries to him**

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR THOSE AWAITING A CHANCE TO COME TO MASS HERE AT THE ABBEY OR TO BOOK INTO THE GUESTHOUSES

1. "BOOKING INTO MASS"--CONTACT Fr. Giles-- guestmaster
- 2.
3. **Pluscarden Oblate Events 2021**

residential bookings:- Fr. Giles by letter( S.A.E. always a good idea!)---- or email

guestmaster.pluscarden@gmail.com for bookings for this summer or officially guestmaster@pluscardenabby.org

***The Pluscarden website is the primary source for day to day information: Please keep an eye on it--especially if you have a "booking"***

**www.pluscardenabbey.org**

**SUMMER OBLATE RETREAT THIS YEAR 2021 NOW ONE**

**WEEK LATER NB**

**6TH – 9TH AUGUST 2021**

**NOW CANON LUKE SMITH, OBLATE**

guestmaster.pluscarden@gmail.com

&/or the official address

**guestmaster@ pluscardenabbey.org**

**for bookings**

**or write guestmaster Fr. Giles OSB**

**Many thanks to our own Bishop Richard Moth for leading the UKOT team retreat/reflection day online on Wednesday held last 19<sup>th</sup> May. We were all most grateful. Thank you Bishop Richard**

**Next Year 2022--1st Weekend of Lent Fr. Abbot Friday 4th March to Monday 7th March.**

**Summer Friday 29th July to Monday 1st August Fr. Stuart Chalmers.**

**2023 Lent Friday 24th February to Monday 27th February Fr. Abbot.**

**Summer 28th to 31st July Bishop Richard Moth.**

**PRAYER INTENTIONS** Abbot Anselm's intentions. Bishop Hugh's & Bishop Richard Moth's(Oblate) intentions. For the repose of the souls of Mrs Anne Morgan and of Mrs Pat Gray and Martin Farrelly, Oblates, and Colin Whittle ,husband of Moira Whittle(Oblate). For Canon Luke Smith( Oblate) Spiritual director Wonnersh & for Fr. Stuart Chalmers (Oblate) spiritual director of the Scots College in Spain &. For Prior Bede & For Fr. Ambrose Flavell in charge of the Shetlands.; vocations to St Mary's and St. Scholastica's, Petersham, U.S.A and Kristo Buase Priory. Joe Bagley, Robert Cantafio and his mother Margharita both occasionally hospitalised(Aberdeen and Italy),and John McKinlay, Jane Coll's granddaughter Natasha Gunn Fr.

Francis Wilson( any news **still** welcomed by Oblatemaster), , Janet Boyd Moss, Connie Reid, Mary Frances McGregor and her daughter Ruth. Please pray for the health of Fr. Matthew, Br. Cyprian, Br. Finbar, Br. Gabriel, Rev. Christopher Mayo, Rev. Angus Macleod(news and address welcome), for Gillian Cockwill's Mother, for Gail & Tony Schmitz. For Siobhan Gilmour's husband, for Mrs. Allie Brien, Margaret Johnston's mother, for Gitte Mackay, , Leonora Duson, and her daughter, Joe Barrett, Maureen Woodhead & her Sister Doreen, Bob Barr, Brian Milne, Fiona Sellar, Johan(Joy) Baillie, Nick MaCrae. Martin MaCrae, Dr. David Paterson and his wife Angela, Jacqui Heath-Anderson and daughter Sally, Dr. Hester du Plessis, Poppy Sinclair, Ian & Frederick Brodie, for Pat Foster, Pam Woodhead, Carolyn, Marshall & Malcolm Boardman, and also for Eileen Kerr, Elizabeth MacKay, Peter and Brian Wynne, Susan Stephen, Cindy's husband, Danielle & her son Osyp, Evelyn, and Sheila, Alistair Macdonald and all the friends of the Abbey and for all Oblates, and for ALL the sick and those who care for them--and for our 3 sponsored seminarians. For vocations and all our novices Brothers Patrick, Edmund and Andrew! , monks and Oblates, and all our Oblates living and dead.Br. Jerome Leo Oblatemaster of St Mary's Petersham. All we have omitted or forgotten, living and dead.

**Our three sponsored seminarians are all doing well.**  
***Their education has been disrupted with the global lockdowns that have been imposed. Uganda is now returning to normal and the seminarians have all***

***returned to their formal studies. Please pray for them and for Sr Catherine OSB, who does so much to keep everything running smoothly and our outgoing coordinator & our new coordinator:***

***Oblate Penelope Coate has taken over as the co-ordinator of the seminarian programme. Penelope Coate's contact details: penelopecoate@yahoo.com. 0794 9399592.***

### **OBLATE CHAPTERS**

**PLEASE MAKE USE OF THE CONTACT DETAILS BELOW TO FIND OUT HOW THINGS ARE PROGRESSING.>>>>▼▼▼▼OR--Contact me( details at the head of every letter!) I can forward or:-**

**St Mungo's Chapter, Glasgow:-**We meet on the second Saturday of each month at 2 p.m. Contact can be made via Peter Aitken. Tel. 0141 427 2084.

**St Margaret's Chapter, Dunfermline** meetings as announced. All details contact Deacon Pat Carrigan [smcb\\_oblates@live.co.uk](mailto:smcb_oblates@live.co.uk)

**St. Monica's Chapter for far North** -- Thurso. Contact Jane Coll. "Scaraben", Westside, Dunnet, Thurso, Caithness, KY14 8YD. Phone 01847 851467( informal)-- and Orkney and Shetland by zoom I understand!

**St. Peter's Chapter, Aberdeen** --When resuming 7.00-8.00 pm each second Tuesday of each month, Church

Hall, St Joseph's, 2 Tanfield Walk, Aberdeen &/or contact Mr Robert Ian Johnston, 31, Tay Road, Mastrick, ABERDEEN AB16 5LA

**"St Andrew's Chapter"** AT PRESENT ONCE A MONTH ON A TUESDAY AS ANNOUNCED IN CHURCH NONE ANFOR HALF AN HOUR AFTER--LIVESTREAMED FOR THOSE NOT PRESENT --FROM WEBSITE.

Pluscarden Abbey St Andrew's Chapter on a Saturday! Saturday 2.00pm - 3.30pm St Benedict's Guest House Men's Breakfast Room (next door on left from Abbey Shop)-Contact Eileen Fitzpatrick.

**St Columba's Chapter** in Dundee -- if interested please contact Mrs. Georgina Quinn 2D, Church Street, Broughty Ferry DUNDEE Fife DD5 1EZ"

**Benedictine Prayer Circle**-If interested some oblates may like to know of John McKinlay's Benedictine Prayer Circle, see Links on the UKOT website-----which now numbers over 100!! email him.:

—John McKinlay [jgim07@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:jgim07@yahoo.co.uk)

*"Then Simon Peter spoke up  
'You are the Christ,' he said 'the Son of the  
living God.'" Mtt 16.16*

*Love and Blessings- in the Risen Christ*

*Fr. Martin* ΠΑΞ