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The Fiat of the Incarnation

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At the end of the day, there are only two ways, dust and clay.

We do not like to be clay. Yet, I remember singing at the bed of a beautiful woman at a nursing home, a great saint, mother of many sons, who had a dedicated husband with a voice box, already departed.

I sang the potter song, “Abba, Father, you are the potter, we are the clay; the work of your hands.” She smiled wonderfully and stated, “Beautiful.” This is a memory I will never forget.

But today clay is seen as being submissive. Mary, the greatest of all human beings, not divine, but revered ahead of angels and humans of both genders because of her fiat, “let it be” (meaning she knows she is clay), is a sign of contradiction. For today is it not true that surely human power in its power of choice cannot submit today and be clay?

So we are dust. On Ash Wednesday, we hear, “Dust you are, and unto dust you shall return.” Gloomy, but believers know we are really not just dust, but made in the image and likeness of God. Or so our culture, at least to a greater extent, once knew.

But today, dust, and only dust, reigns more and more. Frantically, dust attempts for meaning, and perhaps achieves some meaning and love, but does love come only from our striving? Or, at the end of the day, does not the reality of those who believe in dust consist in stating we must be dust, and so remain? But, they say, we can at least achieve some meaning and even comfort in our power before our individual demise.

Is not clay better?

Jim Tembrock, OBlSB is a graduate of Saint John's Prep School (1962), Saint John's University (1967), MA theology Saint John's School of Theology (1970), and later MA nursing Saint Scholastica. At Saint John's, he was the first associate director of the Human Life Center. As an oblate of Saint John's Abbey, he has edited the Oblate Newsletter and will be a delegate representing Saint John's Oblates at Rome this October.