



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

April, 2016

Dear Oblates and Friends,

When we deal family or financial difficulties, when we grieve the loss of loved ones, when we face the limitations of age, we can experience discouragement and loss of hope. At such times, we need to look to our faith and the sacraments of the Church for comfort and support.

What does the Rule of Benedict have to say about the sacraments? The Rule contains very few references to the celebration of the Eucharist within community. There is no indication that the monks of the sixth century celebrated Mass on a daily basis. The Rule does allude to Sunday Eucharist in a few places. For example, Chapter 38, “On the Weekly Reader,” states: “Let this upcoming reader, after Mass and Communion, ask all to pray for him that God may keep him from the spirit of pride.” Since the reader’s assignment begins on Sunday and continues until the following Saturday, this statement probably refers to the Sunday Eucharistic celebration.

The Rule connects the offering of the sacred species and the lives of those who wish to become members of the community. Chapter 58 “On the Manner of Receiving Brothers” requires that the novice write his petition for vows in his own hand and place it on the altar. The Rule does not say that action is to take place during Mass, but the placing of the petition on the altar has the symbolic value of offering it to God as the bread and wine are offered. Similar symbolism is found in Chapter 59, “On the Sons of Nobles and of the Poor Who Are Offered.” When a noble’s son is offered to the monastery, his parents are to wrap his hands and the petition in the altar cloth and so offer him. Here also the Rule links the offering of the bread and wine at Mass with the life of the monk.

Another reference to Mass is found in Chapter 60, “On Priests Who May Wish to Live in the Monastery.” Here the Rule allows the priest, on the abbot’s order, to give a blessing and celebrate Mass. In Chapter 63, “On the Order of the Community,” monks are to keep to their rank when receiving the kiss of peace and Communion.

In fact, the central form of worship within the community was, and is, the daily celebration of the Divine Office in common. Chapter 48 “On the Daily Manual Labor” states that the work periods of the monks are to be arranged in such a way that they can attend each of the assigned offices throughout the day. There is no mention of attending Mass anywhere in this chapter.

The Divine Office is referred to the Work of God, the *Opus Dei*. It is a memorial like the Eucharist, with which it is intimately connected. Both the Liturgy of the Hours and the Eucharist draw us into Christ’s paschal mystery. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* describes the Eucharist as “a memorial of [Christ’s] death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity a paschal banquet in which Christ is eaten . . . and a pledge of future glory.” The same document describes the Liturgy of the Hours as “the very prayer which Christ himself, together with his body, addresses to the Father.”

Jesus never promised us an easy path. He instructed us, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it” (Lk 9:23-24). Even during the Easter season, the cross is present. Mary Magdalene stood outside the tomb, weeping. She did not recognize the risen Lord, and thought he was the gardener until he called her by name (Jn 20:11-18). So, too, we do not always recognize the risen Lord when he appears to us, and we have first to stand under the cross and wait by the tomb. But we have faith in Christ’s victory.

And now the news:

Clyde oblates mark your calendars! The next meeting is scheduled for May 13-15. The theme is *The Still Point of the Turning World*, and will be on God’s presence in Scripture and the Rule. It will include a presentation by Sr. Colleen Maura on the use of technology. All are welcome!

Saint Louis area oblates: Meetings are held on the third Saturday of the month from 1:30 - 3:00 p.m. at St. Rose Philippine Duchesne School, Room 1 (accessible from Door 1 at the east end of the school). The group has been discussing *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB. They are also doing *lectio divina* as a group, following *Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* by Luke Dysinger, O.S.B.

Sand Springs oblates: I gave a mini-retreat at the Forest on April 9, and was present for the regular monthly on April 10. The retreat was on the role of Scripture and the Eucharist in the Rule of Benedict and included a group *lectio* experience on that Sunday’s gospel (Jn 21:1-19). A wonderful time was had by all. The Sand Springs oblates usually meet on the first Sunday of the month. The group is reading and discussing *In the Heart of the Temple* by Sr. Joan Chittister.

Sheridan, Wyoming, oblates meet the first Saturday of the month. The group is reading and discussing Sr. Maria-Thomas Beii’s *Study Guide for The Rule of St. Benedict with Reflections for Oblates and All Who Seek God*.

Tucson oblates: our Tucson monastery has four oblate groups: Prescott, East Valley, Phoenix Central, and Tucson. The East Valley group is engaged in a study of mercy, geared toward the Jubilee Year of Mercy. The other groups are discussing Pope Francis' encyclical on ecology. The Prescott group is also discussing Michael Casey's book, *The Road to Eternal Life*. You can read the Tucson oblate newsletter at <http://www.benedictineoblates.com/resources.php>.

Peace,

Sr. Sarah