



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

April, 2018

Dear Oblates and Friends,

The Talmud reports that, so great was the honor of removing the ashes of the sacrifices from the altar that many priests wished to perform this task. To determine who would have this privilege, the zealous young priests used to race up the ramp leading to the top of the altar. One day two of them were running neck in neck and “one of them shoved another and he fell and his leg was broken.” After this incident, a lottery was instituted to determine who would perform the various services (B. Talmud *Yoma* 22a). The race had become too dangerous.

Zeal is defined as “eagerness, ardor, fervor” (<https://www.merriam-webster.com>). Zeal implies vigilance, vigor, alertness, and carefulness. Zeal can push us to accomplish tasks quickly or to show up early. Zeal also connotes rivalry, as in this example from the Talmud.

Zeal is one of the indications of a monastic vocation. Benedict writes in Chapter 58 of his Rule: “Let her [the senior] examine whether the novice is truly seeking God, and whether she is zealous for the Work of God, for obedience and for trials.”

One aspect of zeal is punctuality, and punctuality sometimes requires haste. We find a similar teaching in Chapter 43 of the Rule:

At the hour for the Divine Office, as soon as the signal is heard, let them abandon whatever they may have in hand and hasten with the greatest speed, yet with seriousness, so that there is no excuse for levity. Let nothing, therefore, be put before the Work of God.

The monastic is warned twice for coming late to meals. If he or she does not amend after two warnings, there are dire consequences: “he shall not be allowed to share in the common table, but shall be separated from the company of all and made to eat alone, and his portion of wine shall be taken away from him, until he has made satisfaction and has amended.”

As in the priestly race, there is sometimes a dark side to zeal. Zeal can degenerate into foolish rivalry. Zeal can turn into fanaticism. Zeal can become petty and dangerous. It can cause us to lose sight of the deeper meanings of religious duties and monastic practices, leading us to attach inappropriate importance to trivial matters.

Saint James was aware of the ambiguity of zeal. He distinguishes between bitter zeal and good zeal:

If you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. Wisdom of this kind does not come down from above but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice. But the wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, gentle, compliant, full of mercy and good fruits, without inconstancy or insincerity. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace for those who cultivate peace.

(James 3:14-18)

A similar distinction is found in Chapter 72 of the Rule:

Just as there is an evil zeal of bitterness which separates from God and leads to hell, so there is a good zeal which separates from vices and leads to God and to life everlasting. This zeal, therefore, the sisters should practice with the most fervent love.

We want to be zealous in a positive way. We do not want to be fanatics, intolerant of those who disagree with us. Let us practice good zeal and do away with any traces of bitter zeal.

And now the news:

Clyde Oblates

The spring weekend is scheduled for June 1-3. The theme is "Praying with Rule of Saint Benedict." Corpus Christi is on June 3, and this will be a wonderful weekend for oblates to come to Clyde. All are welcome!

Tucson Oblates

Teresa Keating, an oblate since 2004, died on Good Friday, March 30, 2018. She will be missed by her Tucson

oblate community. A candle will be lit in her memory at the next oblate meeting. Please hold both Teresa and her family in prayer.

The Tucson oblates meet on the third Sunday of the month. The deans meet monthly on the Saturday following the regular meeting. If you have any questions for the deans, please email tucsonoblates@gmail.com or call 520-664-5136.

Phoenix Central: The Phoenix group meets in the St. John Paul II room at the Mount Claret Retreat Center, 4633 N. 54th Street. The oblates are using the *Study Guide to the Rule of Benedict* by Maria-Thomas Beil, OSB. For information call Patty Williams 602-957-1464.

West Phoenix: The West Phoenix group meets in Glendale for a morning of prayer, community, and fellowship on the third Saturday of the month from 9:00 am -12pm. The group is reading *Lessons from Saint Benedict*, a collection of letters written by Donald Raila, OSB, of Saint Vincent Archabbey. For information call Lisa Hughes at 623-374-2382.

East Valley: The East Valley Oblates meet on the fourth Saturday of the month. The next meeting is on Saturday, February 24. For information call Nancy Kaib 480-883-8025 or Frank Young 480-219-1505.

Sand Springs:

The oblates meet on the first Sunday of the month at 11:30 am in the Bede Building. Visitors are always welcome. The group is reading and discussing *The Divine Dance* by Richard Rohr.

Sheridan, Wyoming:

The group meets on the first Saturday of the month. They are enjoying lively discussions of the *Study Guide for the Rule of St. Benedict* and are also reading *Radical Grace* by Sister Joan Chittister. For information, contact Cel Hope at celhaus@fiberpipe.net; you can also email me at sarah@bspa.us or phone me at 660-944-2221.

Peace,

Sr. Sarah