



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

August, 2014

Dear Oblates and Friends,

Flying home from Tucson this week, I was sitting next to a woman who wanted to talk. I wanted to read or sleep, but she did not allow me to do that. Trying to be patient, I listened to her long account of family woes and sorrows. When she asked me if I had children, I told her that I am a Benedictine sister, not married and without children. Then she said, "I want to leave society and be a hermit. People are just too mean these days. Can I enter a monastery?" I replied that she was past the age limit, but she was not dissuaded. I tried to explain that no one can really escape society, but she was not convinced. I can only pray for her and hope that she finds peace.

Although monks live on the edges of society in many ways, a desire to get away from people is not a good reason to join a monastery or to become an oblate. Living in community, or in a family, makes it impossible to do that. Communal or family life creates a complex web of social relationships. First of all, there are the relationships among the members. Two of the instruments of good works in chapter 4 of the Rule are "to respect the seniors" and "to love the juniors." We must obey our superior, whom we must love "with a sincere and humble charity, as Benedict says in chapter 72. We must also obey one another, "no one following what she considers useful for herself, but rather what benefits another." We should "most patiently endure one another's infirmities, whether of body or of character." This is never an easy task.

Monks also relate to with those who are not members of the community. We interact with friends and extended family. We deal with employees, business people, and salesmen. Moreover, we welcome guests, who may not be known to us personally. Chapter 53 states that guests "are never lacking in a monastery." The chapter continues, "Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ."

Anyone who wants to enter a monastery to escape society would not be accepted. The primary reason one comes to the monastery is to seek God. The senior who is assigned to watch over newcomers is expected to examine "whether the novice is truly seeking God." But how can we seek God, whom we cannot see and whom we cannot fully understand? God said through the prophet Isaiah "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, my thoughts higher than your thoughts" (Is. 55:8-9).

Abbot Columba Marmion provides the answer in his book, *Christ, the Ideal of the Monk*. He writes: "'To seek God' is to remain united to Him by faith, it is to attach ourselves to Him as the object of our love." The end for which we came to the monastery is to seek God, "to refer to Him as our Supreme End, to place in

Him our sole beatitude” (p. 7). Marmion explains that our search for God must be exclusive; that is, we must be attached to nothing apart from God. Our love for God must be a simple, undivided love. We do not come to the monastery for a particular work or to accomplish anything in particular. Most of us do ordinary things in ordinary ways. What we seek is a profound, intimate relationship with our Triune God: “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides” (Mark 6:33).

All of us have times, perhaps many times, when we want to escape from the demands of others, the pressures of work, or the clamor of current events. We need to allow for periods of rest and relaxation, for prayer and solitude. We may need to turn off our televisions and radios, and even our computers, so that we may avoid consistently bad news and enjoy some peace of mind. But we cannot escape society for long. Instead we need to focus on Christ and to deepen our relationship with the One who loves us. Jesus sends us into the world. He prays for his disciples in John 17:15-19:

I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one.

They do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world.

Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth.

As you sent me into the world, so I sent them into the world.

And I consecrate myself for them, so that they also may be consecrated in truth.

And now the news:

The fall retreat at Clyde is scheduled for Sept. 26-28. This is open to all oblates. The theme will be “The Road Not Taken.” If you plan to attend, let me know by Sept. 10. Please email me at sarah@bspa.us or call me at 660-944-2221.

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,

I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference.

St. Louis area oblates are meeting monthly. Meetings are held on the third Saturday of the month at the St. Rose Philippine Duchesne parish office.

Peace.

Sr. Sarah, O.S.B.