



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

August, 2015

Dear Oblates and Friends,

This summer has been one of hot, muggy days with lots of rain. We've had storms waking us up in the middle of the night, with constant lightning and loud claps of thunder. Hail has beaten against our windows. Once we prayed Vespers in the windowless hall that we use for shelter in case of a tornado. There's been no damage except for scattered twigs and leaves. We thank God for protecting us, and wait for summer to end.

In his Rule, Saint Benedict provides for different climates and changing seasons. What does he say about summer? Chapter 10 is titled "The Arrangement of the Night Office in Summer." Because summer nights are shorter, Benedict legislates for one reading instead of three. On Sunday, since the monks rise earlier for vigils, the arrangement is always the same regardless of season (Chapter 11). Benedict does not want to prolong the liturgy beyond the strength of the community. He says "there must be moderation in quantity."

In Chapter 40, "The Proper Amount of Drink," Benedict states: "The superior will determine when local conditions, work, or the summer heat indicate the drink for a greater amount." The reference is to the *hemina* of wine allowed daily for each monk. We don't know the equivalent measure of a *hemina*; RB80 translates "a half bottle." That's still quite a bit of wine. In the next chapter, "At What Hours the Meals Should Be Taken," Benedict mitigates the usual fast on Wednesday and Friday if the monks are working in the fields "or the summer heat is oppressive." The decision on this matter is made by the abbot. Benedict adds: "[The abbot] should adapt and arrange everything in such a way that souls may be saved and that the brethren may do their work without just cause for murmuring." Benedict condemns murmuring, but he also recognizes that there are sometimes reasons for complaints, which should be made through proper channels.

Benedict also considers the clothing and footwear of the monks. He writes in Chapter 55: “Let clothing be given to the brethren according to the nature of the place in which they dwell and its climate; for in cold regions more will be needed, and in warm regions less.” The monks’ cowls and tunics were to be made from whatever material was available in the vicinity at reasonable cost, regardless of its color or coarseness. In winter, the monks wore a woolen cowl, and in summer a thinner or worn one.

In the matter of variable climates, Benedict, as is typical of him, gives the abbot a great measure of discretion. But he does not allow the abbot to be a tyrant. In the distribution of clothing and all other necessary articles, Benedict cautions: “Let the Abbot consider weaknesses of the needy and not the ill-will of the envious. But in all his decisions let him think about the retribution of God.”

As he does here, Benedict warns the monastic superior about divine retribution in several other places. For instance, in Chapter 2, “Qualities of the Abbot,” he says: “Let the Abbot always bear in mind that at the dread Judgment of God there will be an examination of these two matters: his teaching and the obedience of his disciples.” In Chapter 64, “Community Rank,” Benedict writes: “Let [the Abbot] always think of the account he will have to render to God for all his decisions and his deeds.”

The awareness of God’s judgment is closely related to Benedict’s teaching on humility. After all, the first step of humility is “that a person keep the fear of God before his eyes and beware of ever forgetting it” (Chapter 7). This applies to all of us, whether or not we hold a position of authority. We must make and carry out decisions, but we must always remember, too, that we are responsible to God to do so as wisely and discretely as we can.

A suggestion (repeated):

The sisters of Sacred Heart Monastery, Yankton, South Dakota, have an online oblate chapter that enables any oblate to communicate with other oblates from around the world without changing the monastery of affiliation. The link is <http://yanktonbenedictines.org/oblates/online-chapter>. From there just follow the directions at the bottom of the page.

Now the news:

Clyde oblates mark your calendars for the next weekend. September 25-27, 2015. This weekend is open to all oblates. The topic will be *Hearing God’s Voice*. Further information will be forthcoming.

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 is reading and discussing *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB.

Sand Springs oblates are not meeting during the summer months. The next meeting is October 4, 2015, and I hope to be there. The group has chosen *In the Heart of the Temple: My Spiritual Vision for Today's World* by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB, as the next book to read and discuss.

Sheridan, Wyoming, oblates are also not meeting during the summer. Meetings pick up again in September. 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*.

Peace,

Sr. Sarah