



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

August, 2017

Dear Oblates and Friends,

At table earlier this week, one of the sisters asked, “What does it mean, in the Our Father, ‘lead us not into temptation’? How can God lead us into temptation?” Of course, this question has been around for centuries and there is no single answer.

This verse is sometimes translated as “do not put us to the test.” The NRSV has “do not bring us to the time of trial.” Our conversation made me wonder what the word is in the original language, and so I did a bit of research. In Matthew 6:13, the Greek word that is translated “temptation” or “test” is used in the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, in place of a Hebrew term that means “experiment, attempt, trial, proving.” The root of that Hebrew word means “to lift up” and connotes “to weigh.” When we “weigh” a decision or action, we consider its possible consequences and reflect on our options.

For us, the English word “temptation” is usually associated with sin. We are easily tempted to do something immoral, illegal, imprudent, or at least unhealthy. We want to taste the apple or consume the chocolate bar. Although the verse can be translated that way, there are other valid interpretations.

Looking at the Our Father in the context of the entire chapter, we see that the preceding verse is “your kingdom come.” Later in the same chapter, Jesus urges us to “store up treasures in heaven” (Mt 6:20). A few verses after that, he tells us to “seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness” (Mt 6:33). When the kingdom of God comes in its fullness, then we will be “weighed.” We will be assessed and called to account. I recall the psalm verse, “If you, Lord, keep account of sins, Lord, who can stand?” (Ps 130:3). In this sense, “do not put us to the test” may be a plea for mercy.

Although we pray that God not put us to the test, we must do some testing of our own. In John 4:1 we are instructed, “do not trust every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they belong to God.” The distinguishing of spirits is one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12:10), and we should pray to receive that gift. We must be able to discern the difference between good and evil. If Adam and Eve had been able to discern spirits, they would not have eaten the apple.

We find this sense of discernment of spirits in Chapter 58 of the Rule of Saint Benedict, on the entrance of new members. Newcomers must be tested to see if their call to monastic life is genuine. Quoting 1 John 4:1, Benedict says, “When anyone is newly come for the reformation of her life, let her not be granted an easy entrance; but, as the Apostle says, ‘Test the spirits to see whether they are from God.’” Testing comes again after two months: “If she still stands firm, let her be taken to the above-mentioned novitiate and again tested in all patience.”

I like the familiar words of the Our Father, “lead us not into temptation.” I recognize that I am tempted by many things. Still, I have no trouble praying “do not put us to the test.” Testing is hard. There are many kinds of tests, and they come all too frequently in the course of daily life, not just at the beginning. May the merciful Lord preserve us from them all!

And now the news:

Tucson oblates:

St. Philip’s in the Hills Church will be the site for future oblate meetings. The church is on Campbell just north of River Road. Meetings will still be on the 3rd Sunday at 1pm for candidates and inquirers, and 2pm for the larger meeting. St. Philip’s already has a library with books on Benedictine topics and will make a home for the oblate books as well.

Phoenix oblates meet at Mount Claret Retreat Center, 4633 N. 54th St. Phoenix, 85018. The meeting room is the Saint John Paul II room in the back of the parking lot. The Phoenix oblates will continue their study of the Rule of Benedict by Maria-Thomas Beil, OSB.

West Side Phoenix oblates—this is a new chapter in Phoenix. Oblates meet for a morning of

prayer, study, community and fellowship. Children are included. They meet at 19204 N. 70th Avenue, Glendale, on the third Saturday of the month from 9-12am. In August the meeting will be on the second Saturday of the month. For information call Lisa at 623-374-2382.

Clyde oblates: The fall weekend will be held from October 20-22. The schedule and theme has not yet been determined. Further information will be forthcoming.

Saint Louis area oblates: The Saint Louis group has been discussing *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB. They have also been doing group *lectio* following *Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, “Lectio Divina Shared in Community” by Fr. Luke Dysinger, OSB. 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).

Sand Springs: The Sand Springs oblates are off for the summer. The meetings will resume on September 10. The group has yet to decide on a book to use for discussion.

Sheridan, Wyoming, oblates are off for the summer. The first meeting will be on September 16 due to the Labor Day holiday. After that the group will meet the on the first and third Saturdays of the month through May.

Peace,

Sr. Sarah, O.S.B.