



## *The Benedictine Oblate Letter*

*December, 2013*

Dear Oblates and Friends,

Advent, that sacred time of waiting and preparing for the Lord's coming, always seems too short. Christmas comes all too quickly. There is shopping to be done and cookies to bake. The tree has to be put up and decorated. Advent is simply too short.

The Gospel for the First Sunday of Advent warns us to be prepared: "Be sure of this: if the master of the house had known the hour of night when the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and not let his house be broken into. So too, you also must be prepared, for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come" (Mt. 24:42-43). The readings of the first week teach us about faith required to enter into God's kingdom. Then we come to realize that faith must lead us to repent if we are to enter the kingdom. That is the message of John the Baptist: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"

We meet John the Baptist in the Gospel of the Second Sunday, Mt. 3:1-12. John seems to be a wild man. He wore clothing made of camel's hair, and his food was locusts and wild honey. This description of John the Baptist resembles that of Elijah in 1 Kings 1:8: "He wore a hairy garment with a leather belt around his waist."

Jesus identifies John as Elijah: "As they were coming down from the mountain, the disciples asked Jesus, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" He said in reply, "Elijah will indeed come and restore all things but I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him but did to him whatever they pleased" (Mt. 17:9-13). Jesus refers here to the prophecy found in Mal. 3:23-24: "Now I am sending to you Elijah the prophet, Before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible day; He will turn the heart of fathers to their sons, and the heart of sons to their fathers, Lest I come and strike the land with utter destruction."

Some of what we read about St. Benedict is based on the account of the prophet Elijah. Elijah was fed by ravens in the wilderness (1 Kings 17:4-6); St. Benedict had crows as messengers of God. St. Gregory, in Chapter 8 of the *Dialogues*, recounts how a crow carried off a loaf of bread that had been poisoned by a jealous monk. Elijah, fleeing from Jezebel's wrath, hid in a small cave (1 Kings 19:9-13); St. Benedict, "desiring rather the miseries of the world than the praises of men," fled to a desert place and lived in a narrow cave at Subiaco for three years (*Dialogues*,

Chapter 1).

Benedict, like Elijah and John before him, preached repentance. Toward the end of the Prologue he writes: “And the days of this life are lengthened and a truce granted us for this very reason, that we may amend our evil ways. As the Apostle says, ‘Do you not know that God's patience is inviting you to repent’ (Rom. 2:4)? For the merciful Lord tells us, ‘I desire not the death of the sinner, but that the sinner should be converted and live’” (Ez. 33:11).

Malachi's prophecy reveals the hard inner core of repentance when he says of Elijah: “He will turn the heart of fathers to their sons.” Read here, “parents and children.” Are not quarrels within families the most bitter of quarrels? Are not efforts toward reconciliation the most difficult when they are directed toward those family members from whom we are estranged, perhaps for years? When families are able to live together in peace, will not that be the beginning of a lasting world peace?

Family conflicts cannot always be resolved. Not all parties may want to be reconciled; some may nourish grudges. The barriers to reconciliation may be too high, too long-lasting. But this Advent, let us do our part to “seek after peace and pursue it,” as Benedict says in the Prologue, quoting Ps. 34. Then we will be ready to welcome Christ into our hearts at Christmas.

***Just a thought:*** You might like to read the *Dialogues of St. Gregory*, which are available online at [www.osb.org/gen/greg/](http://www.osb.org/gen/greg/).

***A reminder:*** I still intend to post short video clips on the oblate website, discussing various aspects of Benedictine spirituality and prayer. Go to [www.benedictinesisters.org](http://www.benedictinesisters.org), click on oblates, and the videos are under “resources.”

***St. Louis area oblates are meeting monthly.*** They meet every third Saturday of the month at the St. Rose Philippine Duchesne parish office. Their meeting format now allows more time for reflection, prayer, and group lectio. Anyone in the St. Louis area is welcome to attend.

***Clyde meeting dates*** are Feb. 28-Mar. 2 and May 2-4. Mark your calendars!

Peace,

*Sr. Sarah, O.S.B.*

***P.S.*** I am enclosing our new flyer for our bi-monthly magazine ***Spirit&Life***. If you are not a subscriber, please consider becoming one. ***Spirit&Life***, which is free, also makes a good Christmas present! Please help us increase our subscription list.

Our bi-monthly magazine