



## *The Benedictine Oblate Letter*

*December, 2015*

Dear Oblates and Friends,

First off, a blessed Advent and a very merry Christmas to all of you. This coming year is a special year of grace. As you probably know, Pope Francis has decreed 2015 as a Jubilee Year of Mercy. He writes in document, *Misericordiae Vultus*:

The Holy Year will open on December 8, 2015, the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. This liturgical feast day recalls God's action from the very beginning of the history of mankind. After the sin of Adam and Eve, God did not wish to leave humanity alone in the throes of evil. And so he turned his gaze to Mary, holy and immaculate in love, choosing her to be the Mother of man's Redeemer. When faced with the gravity of sin, God responds with the fullness of mercy. Mercy will always be greater than any sin, and no one can place limits on the love of God who is ever ready to forgive. I will have the joy of opening the Holy Door on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception. On that day, the Holy Door will become a *Door of Mercy* through which anyone who enters will experience the love of God who consoles, pardons, and instills hope.

Thresholds, gates, and doors are opened and shut. We enter and leave through doors. Thus doors have always been symbolically or literally places of danger or safety. Doors appear the early chapters of Genesis. When Cain was dejected that his offering was not accepted, God said, "If you act rightly, you will be accepted; but if not, sin lies in wait at the door" (Gn 4:7).

The Bible suggests that doors are signs of deliverance. The Lord told the Israelites to mark the lintels and the two doorposts of their houses, and then he would pass over their doors when he struck down the firstborn of the Egyptians (Ex12:23). Conversely, in Deuteronomy 15:17, a door is used to mark the permanent bondage of a male or female slave who did not want to set free.

In Jewish tradition, homes are marked with a *mezuzah*, a handwritten, rolled parchment scroll enclosed in a small container. The *mezuzah* is placed on the right side of a doorpost. The instructions are found in Deuteronomy 6:9; 11:20: "inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and upon your gates." The scroll includes the first two paragraphs of the *Shema*, the creedal statement that is recited twice daily (Dt 6:4-9, 11:13-21). The back of the parchment is inscribed with the word *Shaddai*, translated "Almighty." Its letters are thought to be an acronym for a Hebrew phrase meaning "Guardian of the doors of Israel."

There are a number of New Testament passages about doors. Jesus calls himself the door in John 10:7, 9. The Greek work translated as "gate" may be better translated as "door": "Amen, amen, I say to you, I am

the gate for the sheep. I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.”

Two other passages also come to mind. The first is Matthew 7:7-8 and its parallels: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” The second is Revelation 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, [then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me.” Both passages speak to me about Christ’s continual presence and availability to us. He is always there when we need him!

All jubilee years are celebrations of the mercy of God and the forgiveness of sins, but this one in particular reminds us of God’s mercy, and the mercy we should extend to others. Let us join in Pope Francis’ prayer for this year:

Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing, so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord, and your Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed, and restore sight to the blind. We ask this through the intercession of Mary, Mother of Mercy, you who live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever. Amen.

***And now the news:***

***Clyde oblates*** mark your calendars! The next weekend is scheduled for March 4-6, 2016. All oblates are welcome. The theme will be *Listening with the Ear of Your Heart*. 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 has been discussing *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB. They are also doing *lectio divina* as a group, following *Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* by Luke Dysinger, O.S.B.

***Sand Springs oblates:*** The next meeting of the Sand Springs oblates is scheduled for Sunday, January 3, and Vince Santine will lead it. The December meeting has been cancelled. The group is reading *In the Heart of the Temple* by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB, and is up to the chapter on work.

***Sheridan, Wyoming, oblates*** meet the first Saturday of the month. 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*.

***Tucson oblates*** meet every third Sunday of the month. They have been discussing Pope Francis’ encyclical on ecology, *Laudato Si’*, in the light of the Rule. New oblates and oblate candidates will be accepted at the January meeting. So far there are six new oblates. Lang Ha Pham, from Albuquerque, New Mexico, spent some days with the Tucson community and was accepted as a candidate.

Peace,

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