



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

February, 2013

Dear Oblates and Friends,

A whole year has passed since my first letter to you. It has been a good year. I've sent out an oblate letter each month. At the end of September, we had an all-oblate retreat at Clyde. We've resumed Clyde oblate meetings, and the St. Louis area oblates have been meeting monthly since October. I've attended an oblate meeting in Sand Springs and visited St. Louis. The past year was one of new beginnings, and hopefully this coming year will be a year of continued growth.

February is a transitional month; it begins in Ordinary Time and ends in Lent. Still, there are some major feasts which bring light and warmth into a cold, blustery, and sometimes snowy month.

The first of these feasts is the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. This feast is the last gasp of the Christmas season. We hear about the aged Simeon, who takes the baby Jesus in his arms and blesses God. We sing his beautiful canticle every night at Compline:

Now, Master, you may let your servant go
in peace, according to your word,
for my eyes have seen your salvation,
which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples:
a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and glory for your people Israel. (Luke 2:29-32)

Then the elderly prophetess Anna also came forward: "she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:38).

Appropriately, the next major feast is my birthday. It is one of those milestone birthdays. I am getting old. A few weeks ago I filed for retirement benefits with Social Security, even though sisters don't usually retire until they're around ninety. I just now received my Medicare card. To mark this event, I've been reading Koheleth, otherwise known as Ecclesiastes. About getting older, the gloomy Preacher writes: "the years approach of which you will say, 'I have no pleasure in them'" (Eccl. 12:1).

Nevertheless Koheleth recommends that we enjoy life: “there is nothing better for mortals under the sun than to eat and to drink and to be joyful; this will accompany them in their toil through the limited days of life God gives them under the sun” (Eccl. 8:15). It is our right and our privilege as human beings to be happy and content. Yet enjoyment is not license. Koheleth concludes with a wise message: “The last word, when all is heard: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this concerns all humankind” (Eccl. 12:13). Koheleth is good reading for aging folk.

The third major February feast is the Solemnity of St. Scholastica. We know very little about her, except that she was the twin sister of St. Benedict. There are a few stories about her in *The Dialogues of St. Gregory*. She is often depicted as holding a crozier and a dove. The crozier is because she was an abbess and the dove is because, according to St. Gregory, St. Benedict saw her soul ascend into heaven in the likeness of a dove. A dove is symbolic. The Holy Spirit is represented as a dove. Doves are also symbols of love and peace. The motto of the Benedictine order is “*pax*” that is, “peace.”

Then, after the feasts, comes the fast. Ash Wednesday falls on Feb. 13. Let’s not forget that for St. Benedict the whole purpose of Lent is that “with the joy of spiritual desire we may look forward to holy Easter” (RB 49). Koheleth would approve. Benedict wants us to be holy, not forlorn. Let’s anticipate Easter without finding Lent “too wearisome for words” (Eccl. 1:8).

Here are some reminders: I am posting short video clips on the oblate website. The topic has been “Prayer in the Rule of St. Benedict.” The next few videos will be on *lectio divina*. Each video segment concludes with reflection questions. These are available to everyone. Go to www.benedictinesisters.org, click on oblates, and the videos are under “resources.”

St. Louis area oblates are meeting every month at the St. Rose Philippine Duchesne parish office, 2650 Parker Road, Florissant MO 63033. The next meetings are Feb. 16 and March 16.

Clyde oblates: Please mark your calendars for the oblate weekends: March 1-3 and May 24-26. Do come!! I’ve sent out a separate letter with a tentative schedule. Please let me know if you expect to attend.

In Christ,

Sr. Sarah, O.S.B.