



*The Benedictine Oblate Letter*

*February, 2017*

Dear Oblates and Friends,

Normally I would be writing a letter about Saint Scholastica, but it seems a bit late for that. Her feast, February 10, is already past. We had a glorious celebration. Thirty monks from Conception Abbey joined us for Vespers and a wonderfully delicious meal. That's what we say jokingly that monks do: pray and eat. With the feast over, we now look toward Ash Wednesday on March 1, and the long weeks of Lent, which sometimes seems to drag. So I could write about Chapter 49 of the Rule, on Lent, but I've done that many times before, and feel moved to write about something else.

I've had silence on my mind, perhaps because, as I write this, there's a meeting going on in the room next to mine. I am not a part of it; I hear voices without being able to make out the words. That's a good thing; without understanding it, I am not tempted to listen and can continue working in peace.

I think the lack of comprehension has something to do with silence. It is an appropriate response in the face of an incomprehensible event. In this regard, I think of the death of a loved one, when we ask, "Why? Why now? Why wasn't it me?" We have faith that death is part of the divine plan. We believe that our loved one is with God and is free of pain and suffering. But there is no explanation or rationale. There is really nothing we can say to those who mourn, at least nothing that makes sense. There is only acceptance, and that comes with time. The Jewish blessing in response to death and tragedy indicates this: "Blessed is the true Judge."

There is wisdom in traditional Jewish mourning practices, according to which visitors come to the house of mourning to sit with the bereaved in silence, saying nothing unless the mourner initiates conversation. The silence conveys empathy just by being with the one who grieves, being present to them and

accompanying them in their sorrow and loss. This is true consolation.

In the Book of Leviticus, Aaron loses his two sons, Nadab and Abihu, who are consumed by fire when they offer incense that was not commanded of them. Aaron's response was silence: "And Aaron was silent" (Lv 10:3). Aaron did not complain; he accepted the Lord's judgment. The sages say he was rewarded for his silence: a few verses later, the Lord speaks to Aaron directly, without intermediary.

Silence allows us to listen as disciples. In Chapter Six of the Rule, "On the Spirit of Silence," Benedict relates silence to obedience, submission, and humility inspired by reverence. Silence allows humility to grow. Silence teaches us to accept reality. Without acceptance, we cannot have peace of heart.

Also in Chapter Six, Benedict frowns on "coarse jests and idle words or words that move to laughter." Laughter is good, but vulgarity is not. Moreover, throughout the Rule, Benedict consistently condemns complaining. How much of speech is of this type? Wouldn't it be more difficult, and also more beneficial, to give up complaining for Lent than it would be to give up chocolate?

***A reminder:***

All oblates should receive our magazine *Spirit&Life*. Do let me know if you are not receiving it or enter a subscription through our website at <http://www.benedictinesisters.org/spirit-and-life-magazine-home.php>. The price is right: it's free.

***And now rest of the news:***

The International Congress of Benedictine Oblates will meet Nov. 4-10, 2017, in Rome. The theme is *A Way Forward: the Benedictine Community in Movement*. If anyone is interested, let me know.

***Tucson oblates:***

Tucson oblates are encouraged to make use of the oblate library, which has Lenten and other books available that can enrich the experience of *lectio divina*.

Prescott is up to Chapter 29 of Michael Casey's book, *The Road to Eternal Life*.

East Valley has completed their study of mercy. The group is considering the *Study Guide for the Rule of St. Benedict with Reflections for Oblates and All Who Seek God*, by Abbess Emerita Maia-Thomas Beil, OSB, of the Abbey of St Walburga, but a final decision has not yet been made.

**Clyde oblates:** A weekend is scheduled for March 24-26, 2017, during Lent. The theme is *Images of God in Scripture and in the Rule of Benedict*.

**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, O.S.B. 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** oblates are continuing their discussion of Joan Chittister's book, *In the Heart of the Temple*. I will be offering a mini-retreat there for all oblates and friends on May 5-7, 2017.

**Sheridan, Wyoming**, oblates meet monthly.

Peace,

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