



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

January, 2014

Dear Oblates and Friends,

I'm later than usual in writing this letter. We enjoyed our Christmas and New Year festivities and they are now only a memory. This past Saturday we had the great joy of celebrating the final profession of our Sr. Maria Victoria. Her family and friends came from far and near to join us for the occasion. Sr. Maria Victoria was born in Argentina, and the flag of that country is still on display in our monastery. Alas, although Pope Francis was invited, he did not come. Nevertheless, Abbot Gregory Polan of Conception Abbey was, as he always is, a most eloquent presider.

After Sr. Maria Victoria pronounced her final vows and signed the profession document, which she wrote in her own hand, she sang the *Suscipe* three times, as specified in Chapter 58 of the Rule: "Let the novice at once intone this verse: 'Receive me, O Lord, according to Your word, and I shall live, and let me not be confounded in my hope' (Ps. 119:116). Let the whole community answer this verse three times and add the 'Glory be to the Father.'" Then Sr. Maria Victoria prostrated in front of the altar while the community recited Psalm 51 in its entirety. This penitential psalm begins:

Have mercy on me, God, in accord with your merciful love;

in your abundant compassion blot out my transgressions.

Thoroughly wash away my guilt;

and from my sin cleanse me.

For I know my transgressions;

my sin is always before me.

These ritual actions symbolize a radical surrender to God and full reliance on God's mercy and compassion. The penitential tone reflects, at least in part, an understanding of repentance as a

return to God. St. Benedict writes in the Prologue: “Receive willingly and carry out effectively your loving father's advice, that by the labor of obedience you may return to Him from whom you had departed by the sloth of disobedience.” The penitential aspect also reflects an implicit relationship of monastic profession to baptism, in that baptism forgives all sins. We find in the Catechism: “Through Baptism we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission” (#1213). Monastic profession, like baptism, may be seen as a rebirth and a deeper incorporation into the Body of Christ.

After the prostration, the finally professed members of the community extended a sign of peace (usually a hug) to the newly professed. St. Benedict writes: “And from that day forward

let her be counted as one of the community.” According to RB 58, after this any property a sister may have is either given to the poor or bestowed on the community. The act of renunciation is symbolized by being divested of her own clothes and being dressed in the clothes of the monastery. The full extent of this renunciation is described in RB 33:

Let no one presume to give or receive anything without the Abbot's leave, or to have anything as his own-- anything whatever, whether book or tablets or pen or whatever it may be-- since they are not permitted to have even their bodies or wills at their own disposal; but for all their necessities let them look to the Father of the monastery. And let it be unlawful to have anything which the Abbot has not given or allowed. Let all things be common to all, as it is written (Acts 4:32), and let no one say or assume that anything is his own.

There is much to reflect on here. Why and how do we surrender to God? Do we really rely on God's mercy, kindness, and compassion rather than on our own strength and ability? Do we willingly and cheerfully sacrifice some small portion of our time and resources for the good of others? And we can ask ourselves many additional questions.

And now the news:

An invitation is extended to all oblates to attend the 7th Annual Monastic Institute, July 17-20, at Sophia Center, the spirituality center of Mount St. Scholastica Monastery, Atchison, KS. The speaker is Kathleen Norris. Space is limited and registrations will be taken as they come in. For information contact Sr. Mary Elizabeth Schweiger, OSB, at maryliz@mountosb.org or phone her at 913-426-7355.

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, click on oblates, and the videos are under “resources.”

St. Louis area oblates are meeting monthly. Meetings are held on the third Saturday of the month at the St. Rose Philippine Duchesne parish office. Anyone in the St. Louis area is welcome to attend, but email me first at sarah@bspa.us to check on the meeting time and place.

Clyde meeting dates are Feb. 28-Mar. 2 and May 2-4. The topic of the February meeting is *A Tale of Two Siblings: Forgiveness and Reconciliation*. Mark your calendars!

Peace,

Sr. Sarah, O.S.B.