



*The*

*Benedictine Oblate Letter*

*January, 2015*

Dear Oblates and Friends,

I hope you all had a very merry Christmas. The New Year is a time for fresh starts and new beginnings. May it also bring happiness and peace.

Last month I wrote about the Year of Consecrated Life that Pope Francis proclaimed in an apostolic letter. I remarked that all Christians are consecrated by their baptism. As we head toward the celebration of our Lord's baptism, it is appropriate to take some time to reflect on our own baptism. It is by virtue of our baptism that we become what Saint Peter calls us (1 Pet 2:9), "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own."

The Rule of Benedict may be read as an extended baptismal catechesis. One reason is that both baptism and monastic profession require a renunciation of the world and the allurements of the devil. The concept of baptismal renunciation is ancient. In his treatise *On the Mysteries*, Saint Cyril of Jerusalem (ca. 313 – 386), using the image of the catechumen entering the baptistery, writes vividly:

As soon, then, as you entered, you put off your tunic; and this was an image of putting off the old man with his deeds (Col 3:9). Having stripped yourselves, you were naked; in this also imitating Christ, who was stripped naked on the Cross, and by His nakedness put off from Himself the principalities and powers, and openly triumphed over them on the tree.

(<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/310120.htm>)

In our own time, baptism is still understood as a renunciation of temptation and evil. In the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults, the presider asks the candidate three questions: "Do you renounce Satan? And all his works? And all his attractions?"

The link between monastic profession and baptismal renunciation is found as early as Saint Jerome (347-420). In a letter to Demetrias, a high-born woman who had become a consecrated virgin, Jerome wrote: "You have relinquished the world and besides your baptismal vow have taken a new one; you have entered into a compact with your adversary and have said: I renounce you, O devil, and your world and your pomp and your works" (<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001130.htm>).

Benedict does not refer to Satan or to baptism, but there are allusions to both. Benedict requires an act of renunciation upon entering the monastery, that is, the renunciation of our own will. At the beginning of the Prologue, he says: "To you, therefore, my words are now addressed, whoever you may be, who are

renouncing your own will to do battle under the Lord Christ, the true King, and are taking up the strong, bright weapons of obedience.”

While Benedict does not refer explicitly to baptism, allusions may be found in Chapter 58, “The Procedure for Receiving Brothers.” The novitiate training, during which the Rule is read three times, is modeled on the catechumenate. After two months, another six months, and finally an additional four months, the Rule is read to the novice. Each time the novice is addressed: “Here is the law under which you wish to fight. If you can observe it, enter; if you cannot, you are free to depart.”

Later Benedictine tradition introduced a more obvious baptismal symbolism into the profession rite. Some monastic writers have even referred to monastic profession as a sort of second baptism. But of course we have already been baptized; monastic profession is not a second baptism but rather a deepening of that holy covenant. When I made profession, I was covered with the funeral pall. This was intended to bring out the idea that a monk is buried with Christ in order to rise with him. The pall is no longer used, since we have already risen with Christ. Nevertheless, the novice still prostrates after she sings the *Suscipe*: “Receive me, O Lord, according to your word, and I shall live: and let me not be confounded in my hope” (Ps 119:116).

All of us can benefit from reflection on our baptism, whether we were baptized as infants or as adults. We can always deepen the solemn commitment that we made, or which was made for us, at baptism. Romans 6:3-5 is a beautiful text with which to meditate on this sacrament:

Are you unaware that we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were indeed buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life. For if we have grown into union with him through a death like his, we shall also be united with him in the resurrection.

*And now the news:*

*Clyde oblates* mark your calendars! The next weekend will be March 20-22, 2015. Thus you will be here for the Feast of St. Benedict, March 21, which commemorates his death.

*St. Louis area oblates are meeting monthly.* Meetings are held on the third Saturday of the month from 1:30 p.m. - 3:00 at St. Rose Philippine Duchesne School. Meetings are held in Room 1, which is accessible from Door 1 at the east end of the school.

Peace,

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