



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

June, 2014

Dear Oblates and Friends,

In just a few days, the Congregation will begin two weeks of Chapter meetings. Shortly after that, I will be travelling east to visit my family. Thus I am writing this letter earlier than usual. You'll have to wait to learn who has been elected to lead the Congregation into the future.

On June 22, we will celebrate the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ, also known as Corpus Christi. In the old days, it was marked by a solemn outdoor procession with the Eucharist displayed in a monstrance, followed by benediction. I remember lots of incense, oodles of flowers, and very long homilies. As a junior sister, I had the unpleasant duty of cleaning the sidewalk of whatever defiled it. On one rainy day the procession had to be moved indoors; we processed two by two, around and around the chapel a multitude of times.

Corpus Christi is still an important feast although we do not celebrate it in quite the same way. The elaborate, labor-intensive processions were eliminated years ago. But the celebration of the Eucharist and its extension in Eucharistic adoration still lies at the heart of our vocation. The preface to our constitution states: "Integration of monastic life and dedication to Jesus Christ in the Eucharist continue to be the call and commitment of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration whose aim is to reflect the understanding the Church has of herself and of Eucharist." At monastic profession, each sister dedicates herself to the adoration of Christ in the Eucharist.

The Eucharistic dimension of our vocation comes from our foundress, Mother M. Anselma Felber. She was superior of the five pioneer sisters who journeyed from the Swiss Alps to the rolling hills of northwest Missouri in 1874. Although the sisters originally came to serve the immigrant population, we know from Mother Anselma's letters that she wanted to bring the devotion of perpetual adoration to America. She believed that America needed prayer more than schools or any other missionary activity.

An explicit devotion to the Eucharist cannot be found in Benedict's Rule. There is no indication in that the monks of the sixth century celebrated Mass on a daily basis. This practice developed with the founding of the Abbey of Cluny in Burgundy in 910. However, there are several references to Mass in the Rule. The Rule associates the offering of the sacred species with the lives of those who wish to become members of the community.

While the Rule of St. Benedict makes very few references to the celebration of Mass, the Liturgy of the Hours is of utmost importance. It is referred to the Work of God (*Opus Dei*). In the celebration of the Eucharist, the Lord is made present through his Word and sacrament. Thus the Eucharist has the power to transform our lives. In the Liturgy of the Hours, we encounter Jesus through the psalms and scripture readings.

The cosmic dimension of the Eucharist, where Heaven and earth meet, is also alluded to in the Rule. In chapter 31, St. Benedict asserts that the monastery cellarer, who is the one chosen to care for the goods of the monastery, "to regard all the utensils of the monastery and its whole property as if they were the sacred vessels of the altar."

Every aspect of our lives should be Eucharistic in nature. This can be seen in monastic profession, when the monastic becomes the sacrificial offering and is intimately united with the sacrifice of Jesus. As the sister prostrates herself before the altar, the litany of saints is sung; she rises when the litany is concluded. This is a beautiful image of resurrection to new life. The newly professed has made a total offering of self in service to God and to the Church; she knows that "from that day forward she will no longer have power even over her own body" (RB 58). For this reason, the profession of monastic vows has been understood to be a second baptism, even though profession is not a sacrament. At the conclusion of the ritual, the psalm verse known as the *Suscipe* (Ps. 118:116) is sung three times: "Receive me, O Lord, according to your promise, and I shall live." This verse sums up the meaning of our lives.

And now the news:

The fall retreat at Clyde is scheduled for Sept. 26-28. This will be open to all oblates. The theme will be "The Road Not Taken." Mark your calendars! If you plan to attend, please email me at sarah@bspa.us or call me at 660-944-2221.

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,

*I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

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.

Peace,

Sr. Sarah, O.S.B.