



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

March, 2017

Dear Oblates and Friends,

Living in Missouri presents some challenges, one of which is the weather. Some states are more prone to tornadoes, others to hurricanes, and some to earthquakes. In Missouri, we've sought shelter from tornadoes. We've experienced severe thunderstorms and hail. We even felt an earthquake one morning, which originated in Oklahoma. What we experience most is variety. In March, one day can feel like spring. The songbirds chirp merrily and the daffodils bloom. The bees buzz and look for nectar. Then that same night, the wind rises in the north, temperatures plummet, and snow covers the ground.

Somehow we learn to cope with these trials and tribulations. We have been tested as gold in the fire. Saint Benedict knew all about testing. In the first chapter of his Rule, "On the Kinds of Monks," he defines anchorites, that is, hermits, in this way: "those who, no longer in the first fervor of their reformation, but after long probation in a monastery, having learned by the help of many brethren how to fight against the devil, go out well armed from the ranks of the community to the solitary combat of the desert." Novices are tested thoroughly. We read in Chapter 58, "On the Manner of Receiving Sisters": "When anyone is newly come for the reformation of her life, let her not be granted an easy entrance; but, as the Apostle says, 'Test the spirits to see whether they are from God.'" Novices must be "zealous for trials." They are told "all the hard and rugged ways by which the journey to God is made." Priests and pilgrim monks wishing to enter are also tested.

The ability to withstand trials and to persevere is, at least in part, a matter of spiritual maturation. It is not only a matter of aging, although it is developmental. Hopefully, wisdom comes with age and experience. This is what Scripture tells us: "So with old age is wisdom, and with length of days understanding. With him are wisdom and might; his are counsel and understanding" (Job 12:12). Even grey hair is of benefit: "Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained by a life that is just" (Prv 16:31).

I asked my good friend, Google, about this. Google sent me to a report of a study done by a Canadian doctor, Dr. Oury Monchi, from the University Geriatrics Institute of Montreal. He says this: "We now

have neurobiological evidence showing that with age comes wisdom and that as the brain gets older, it learns to better allocate its resources. Overall, our study shows that Aesop's fable about the tortoise and the hare was on the money: being able to run fast does not always win the race - you have to know how to best use your abilities. This adage is a defining characteristic of aging. It is as though the older brain is more impervious to criticism and more confident than the young brain" (www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/howaboutthat/8833800/Age-brings-wisdom-scientists-say.html). This is wonderful news!

Here is something for your further reflection:

The hare laughed at the tortoise's feet but the tortoise declared, "I will beat you in a race!" The hare replied, "Those are just words. Race with me, and you'll see! Who will mark out the track and serve as our umpire?" "The fox," replied the tortoise, "since she is honest and highly intelligent." When the time for the race had been decided upon, the tortoise did not delay, but immediately took off down the race course. The hare, however, lay down to take a nap, confident in the speed of his feet. Then, when the hare eventually made his way to the finish line, he found that the tortoise had already won.

(<http://mythfolklore.net/aesopica/perry/226.htm>)

And now 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:

In February oblate dean Jessie Zander gave a presentation on forgiveness. She said that, in the creed, we proclaim our belief in a God of forgiveness. Forgiveness is the last thing mentioned in the Creed because it is the last thing learned in life.

The March meeting is on March 19 and the April meeting is on April 9, Palm Sunday, because of Easter.

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

East Valley is using 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. They started out with questions for study and dialogue.

Clyde oblates: The March weekend is nearly here: March 24-26, 2017. The theme is *Images of God in Scripture and in the Rule of Benedict*. I have scheduled a spring weekend: June 2-4, the weekend of Pentecost. The theme for the June weekend is yet to be determined.

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, OSB. 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