



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

May, 2015

Dear Oblates and Friends,

As followers of Saint Benedict, most of us have said, at one time or other, that we are on a spiritual path. We describe our search for God as a spiritual journey. Sometimes the path is overgrown and full of weeds. The way is rough, full of steep hills. We may even complain that we do not know where we are going. We need to pray for the faith of Abraham. He also did not go where he was going. Neither did the disciples of Jesus.

In the Book of Genesis, when the Lord called Abram, he did not tell him where he was to go. The Lord said: “Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you” (Gen 12:1).

Later, after Abram had become Abraham, the Lord called him again. This time the Lord told Abraham to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Once again God did not give Abraham precise directions. God said: “Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There offer him up as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you” (Gn 22:2).

The same pattern is found in the New Testament: first Jesus calls his disciples and only then does he give them directions. Jesus tells his disciples that they do not know the way. In John’s Gospel we read that two disciples, traditionally John and Andrew, heard what Jesus said and followed him. When Jesus saw them, he said to them, “What are you looking for?” They replied, “Rabbi, where are you staying?” He answered, “Come, and you will see” (Jn 1:37-39). Later, as Jesus approaches his passion, he even tells Peter that he cannot follow him now: “Simon Peter said to him, ‘Master, where are you going?’ Jesus answered [him], ‘Where I am going, you cannot follow me now, though you will follow later’” (Jn 13:36). Jesus calls himself the way. Thomas

asks Jesus, “Master, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?” Jesus replied, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (Jn 14:5-6).

In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul and Timothy cannot go every place they want to go. We read: “They traveled through the Phrygian and Galatian territory because they had been prevented by the holy Spirit from preaching the message in the province of Asia. When they came to Mysia, they tried to go on into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them, so they crossed through Mysia and came down to Troas.” But they cannot stay in Troas: “During [the] night Paul had a vision. A Macedonian stood before him and implored him with these words, ‘Come over to Macedonia and help us’” (Acts 16:6-10).

The metaphor of the spiritual life as a journey, on which a person progresses by levels or stages, is a familiar one in religious literature throughout the centuries. Sometimes the metaphor of the journey is one of ascent, representing the journey as an upward one, by which a person arrives at union with the divine or reaches heaven.

Saint Benedict uses the metaphors of both journey and ascent. In the Prologue, Benedict asks: “What can be sweeter to us, dear ones, than this voice of the Lord inviting us? Behold, in His loving kindness the Lord shows us the way of life.” First Benedict tells us to “walk in his paths by the guidance of the Gospel, that we may deserve to see Him who has called us to his kingdom.” Then he tells us “if we wish to dwell in the tent of that kingdom, we must run to it by good deeds or we shall never reach it.” First we walk, then we run, and after that we must climb. Citing Psalm 15:1, Benedict writes: “let us ask the Lord, with the Prophet, ‘Lord, who shall dwell in your tent, or who shall rest upon your holy mountain’”?

The journey metaphor is also implicit in the understanding of the vow of *conversatio* as fidelity to the monastic way of life. The vow of *conversatio* applies to “those who live in monasteries and serve under a rule and an Abbot,” with all that entails, including the inevitable difficulties of obedience and community life.

In chapter 7 on humility, Benedict uses the metaphor of ascent: “if we wish to reach the very highest point of humility and to arrive speedily at that heavenly exaltation to which ascent is made through the humility of this present life, we must by our ascending actions erect the ladder Jacob saw in his dream, on which Angels appeared to him descending and ascending.” The last and twelfth step of humility is the end of the climb, the top of the ladder. Benedict says: “Having climbed all these steps of humility, therefore, the monk will presently come to that perfect love of God which casts out fear.” If love is the end of the journey, it is also the motive for

undertaking the journey in the first place. Benedict concludes Chapter 7: “No longer will his motive be the fear of hell, but rather the love of Christ, good habit and delight in the virtues which the Lord will deign to show forth by the Holy Spirit in His servant now cleansed from vice and sin.”

Now the news:

Clyde oblates The next weekend will be June 5-7, 2015. The topic will be *The Fear and Love of God*. If you plan on attending, please contact me now by phone, 660-944-2221, or email at sarah@bspa.us.

Sand Springs oblates are not meeting during the summer months. The next meeting is October 4, 2015, and I hope to be there. The group has chosen *In the Heart of the Temple: My Spiritual Vision for Today's World* by Sister Joan Chittister, OSB, as the next book to read and discuss.

Sheridan, Wyoming, oblates are also not meeting during the summer. Meetings pick up again in September. The group is reading and discussing Sr. Maria-Thomas Beii's *Study Guide for The Rule of St. Benedict with Reflections for Oblates and All Who Seek God*.

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