



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

November, 2014

Dear Oblates and Friends,

Every year on November 15, the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration celebrate the Feast of the Dedication of our chapel. I've always loved the readings, hymns, and antiphons of this feast. I enjoy the peaceful beauty of lit candles lining the chapel walls and the lingering fragrance of incense. As it is meant to, the feast reminds us of the sanctity of the place as well as the sanctity of each person who comes to pray there.

Last month I mentioned that the words "house of God and gate of heaven," are inscribed in Latin, *domus dei et porta coeli*, on the exterior walls of the Clyde chapel. There is another phrase inscribed on the walls, the Latin phrase *domus mea domus orationis vocabitur*. This phrase is taken from Isaiah 56:7: "For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples." Isaiah refers to a glorious time when all nations will come to share in Israel's covenant.

In the synoptic gospels, Jesus uses Isaiah 56:7 in combination with Jeremiah 7:11: "Has this house which bears my name become in your eyes a den of thieves?" When Jesus chases the traders and money-changers out of the temple, he shouts angrily: "It is written: 'My house shall be a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of thieves'" (Mt 21:12-13, Mk 11: 15-17, Lk 19:45-46). Saint Benedict may have had this scene in mind when he wrote Chapter 52 of his Rule: "Let the oratory be what it is called, a place of prayer; and let nothing else be done there or kept there."

Let nothing else be done there. Benedict was opposed to the practice in some monasteries of doing handiwork during communal prayer. He wanted his monks to remain focused on prayer. In Chapter 19, "On the Manner of Saying the Divine Office," he states: "Let us take part in the psalmody in such a way that our mind may be in harmony with our voice."

Or kept there. Saint Benedict wanted the monastic oratory to be free of clutter. This requirement is similar to the prohibition of wordy prayer in Chapter 20: "And let us be assured that it is not in saying a great deal that we shall be heard, but in purity of heart and in tears of compunction." Benedict also prohibits general noise prohibited in Chapter 52.

Saint Benedict does not describe the oratory or its furniture. He details the Divine Office, but he does not provide a specific method or system of personal prayer. He does not mention specific rituals, postures, or gestures to accompany private prayer. Instead he alludes to Jesus' instructions in the Gospel:

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. (Mt 6:5-8)

Of course, this does not mean that we cannot enjoy a steaming cup of coffee while we pray. It does not prevent us from crocheting or knitting in a reflective, meditative manner. Benedict refers not only to a place but also to us, who are the temple of God and the dwelling place of the Spirit. What is required when we pray is that we give God our full attention as best we can, and in whatever way we can.

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.

P.S. To warm us on a cold day, the photo is of our Tucson, Arizona, monastery.