



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

November, 2015

Dear Oblates and Friends,

This past Thursday night, our Sr. Brigid Riordan suffered a massive stroke, and she died early Friday morning. She never regained consciousness. Her death was very sudden and unexpected. The sisters keep saying, "I can't believe it." We're in shock. Sr. Brigid was an active and vital member of the community, and she leaves a large hole to fill.

We remember our departed loved ones all the time, but November is the month we particularly dedicate to praying for them. Prayer for the dead is an ancient practice in both Judaism and in Christianity. The setting aside of a special date for such prayer was well established by the year 1000. At Clyde, we have the custom of praying for all of our departed sisters at the end of Vespers throughout the month, naming about twelve each evening. The congregational necrology lists well over three hundred names. Now Sr. Brigid is included.

The devotion to the holy souls includes prayer for those in purgatory, which the Church defines in the *Catechism* as the final purification of the elect. The *Catechism* explains: "All who die in God's grace and friendship, but still imperfectly purified, are indeed assured of their eternal salvation; but after death they undergo purification, so as to achieve the holiness necessary to enter the joy of heaven." (http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a12.htm, articles 1030- 1031). There is no mention of Purgatory being a place, or of lasting for a specific length of time.

Our magazine, *Spirit&Life*, was originally entitled *Tabernacle and Purgatory*. The name was changed in after Vatican II, and it now sounds strange to our ears. However, its meaning is profound. The first issue, published in 1905, states, regarding the first title, *Tabernacle*: "Whether the Holy Eucharist be considered in its continual abiding upon our altars until the end of the world and in a hundred thousand places, or as a sacrifice, or as the food of our souls, there are always revealed to us great and unfathomable mysteries of divine love." Regarding its second title, *Purgatory*, it explains: "The Holy

Eucharist is the greatest consolation for the poor souls, and is a most powerful means of obtaining for them relief and deliverance.” Thus the Eucharistic charism of the Congregation is closely linked to prayer for the dead, and both are related to the love and mercy of God.

“To keep death daily before one’s eyes” is one of the tools of good works listed in Chapter Four of the Rule. This can be interpreted in more than one way. RB1980 translates: “Day by day remember that you are going to die.” This makes sense since the three tools immediately before it are: “To fear the Day of Judgment. To be in dread of hell. To desire eternal life with all the passion of the spirit.” We can take these tools very personally as a reminder of our sinfulness before God, our need to repent, and our dependence on God’s forgiveness and mercy. We can also interpret “to keep death daily before one’s eyes” in a more general way. We are all fragile and vulnerable. God may come for us at any time. If I had known that Sr. Brigid would be gone in a few hours, would I have been more attentive to her as I sat with her at the noon meal on Thursday? Would I have taken more time to listen to her? Would I have been in less of a rush as we washed dishes together?

We are all precious in God’s sight, and we need to treasure one another. Saint Benedict urges us to “regard all the utensils of the monastery and its whole property as if they were the sacred vessels of the altar” (Chapter 31). Would that we would see each other in that divine light.

And now the news:

Clyde oblates mark your calendars! The next weekend is scheduled for March 4-6, 2016. All oblates are welcome. The theme will be *Listening with the Ear of Your Heart*. Information will be forthcoming.

Saint Louis area oblates: 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). The group has been discussing *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB. They are also doing *lectio divina* as a group, following *Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* by Luke Dysinger, O.S.B.

Sand Springs oblates: The Sand Springs oblates meet on the first Sunday of the month. They are reading *In the Heart of the Temple: My Spiritual Vision for Today’s World* by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB.

Sheridan, Wyoming, oblates meet the first Saturday of the month. 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*.

Tucson oblates meet every third Sunday of the month. As mentioned, they are discussing Pope Francis' encyclical on ecology, *Laudato Si'*, in the light of the Rule of Saint Benedict.

Peace,

Sr. Sarah