



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

November, 2018

Dear Oblates and Friends,

It seems quite amazing that it is almost Thanksgiving, although the premature snow, howling wind, and frigid temperatures that we have here at Clyde are a bleak reminder that it is mid-November.

Stories about the first Thanksgiving have become part of American mythology, part of our creation narrative. Very little is actually known about it but we do know that the pilgrims held the first Thanksgiving feast to celebrate the successful fall harvest. The fifty-three pilgrims at the first Thanksgiving were the only colonists to survive the long journey on the Mayflower and the first winter in the New World. Disease and starvation had struck down half of the original 102 colonists. These pilgrims made it through the first winter. With the help of the local Wampanoag tribe, they had a hearty supply of food to sustain them through the next winter. The Wampanoag themselves had been decimated by diseases brought by Europeans. Thus the feast developed in a context of suffering, grief, and loss.

The first Thanksgiving was not even called by that name. It was a three-day harvest festival celebrating abundance. The menu included waterfowl, venison, ham, lobster, clams, berries, fruit, pumpkin, and squash. We feast on turkey, dressing, sweet potatoes, cranberry sauce, and pumpkin pie. We remember to give thanks as we enjoy the food. But, unlike the pilgrims, we need not fear starvation or plague.

What does it mean to give thanks? Neither “gratitude” nor “thanks” is found in the thematic index of RB80. Perhaps the reason is that gratitude is a pervasive monastic attitude that should always permeate our lives.

I do find two specific references to thanking God. The first is found in Chapter 34, “Distribution of Goods According to Need”:

Whoever needs less should thank God and not be distressed, but whoever needs more should feel

humble because of his weakness, not self-important because of the kindness shown him.

In this chapter, Benedict cautions, “First and foremost there must be no word or sign of the evil of grumbling, no manifestation of it for any reason at all.”

The second reference is found in Chapter 66, “The Porter of the Monastery.” The porter is instructed: As soon as anyone knocks, or a poor man calls out, he replies, “Thanks be to God” or “Your blessing, please,”; then, with all the gentleness that comes from the fear of God, he provides a prompt answer with the warmth of love.

In the following sentence, Benedict adds: “Let the porter be given one of the younger brothers if he needs help.” Again, Benedict makes every effort to avoid causes of justified murmuring.

We have in the Rule, then, a practice that can sustain and strengthen our attitude of gratitude. Don’t complain. Accept what God provides. Help those who have less than you do. Be hospitable. Be gentle and loving. Then you have a grateful heart.

And now the news:

Clyde Oblates

The Clyde oblates will spend a weekend at Clyde sometime during Lent. The dates have not yet been scheduled. Further information will be forthcoming. All oblates are welcome to attend.

Tucson Oblates

The Tucson oblates will meet at 2:00pm on the third Sunday of the month Sunday in the Murphy Gallery East. The topic for the December meeting is prayer. Candidates meet at 12:45pm in Ferguson. *The St. Benedict's Toolbox* book group meets in the Murphy Gallery East at 12:45pm. The deans meet monthly on the Saturday following the regular meeting. If you have any questions for the deans, please email tucsonoblates@gmail.com or call 520-664-5136.

Phoenix Central: The Phoenix group meets in the St. John Paul II room at the Mount Claret Retreat Center, 4633 N. 54th Street. For information call Patty Williams 602-957-1464.

West Phoenix: The West Phoenix group will resume meeting in January. Father Kilian McCaffrey,

pastor of St. Elizabeth Seton Parish in Sun City has approved the group meeting there. The group hopes to meet on the third or fourth Saturday of the month. Lisa Hughes will make brochures, hold an information meeting, and speak at masses during Advent. For information call Lisa at 623-374-2382. Thank you, Lisa!

East Valley: The East Valley Oblates meet on the fourth Saturday of the month. Oblates are individually discerning transfer of affiliation to St. Procopius Abbey in Lisle, IL. The monks operate Benedictine University in Mesa. For information call Nancy Kaib 480-883-8025 or Frank Young 480-219-1505.

Sand Springs:

About fifteen oblates enjoyed the retreat weekend given Fr. John O'Neill, pastor of St. John before the Latin Gate in Bartlesville, OK. An excellent guitarist and singer, he began each session with two or three songs. His inspirational talks focused on the themes of listening and obedience.

Osage oblates are welcome to attend a retreat offered by NPR correspondent and Benedictine oblate, Judith Valente, in Red Plains, OK, the weekend of March 23, 2019. More details will be forthcoming.

Gale Clark has taken over from Ginny McCann as the secretary for the oblates. You may address any questions to her at (918) 688-8992 or glclarkrdh@gmail.com.

Sheridan, Wyoming:

Beginning in December, meetings will be on the second Monday rather than on the first. The group will finish Joan Chittister's book, *Radical Grace*, at the December meeting, and may discuss another of her books. For information, contact Cel Hope at celhaus@fiberpipe.net, or email me at sarah@bspa.us or phone me at 660-944-2221.

Peace,

Sr. Sarah