



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

October, 2014

Dear Oblates and Friends,

One of my favorite hymns is “Let Us Build a House” by Marty Haugen. The first verse is:

Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace;
Here the love of Christ shall end divisions; All are welcome, all are welcome.
All are welcome in this place.

The house of God is not just a building. The house of God is us. The house of God is the Church and we are the Church.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the house of God refers to a place where a person experiences God’s presence. When Jacob, fleeing in fear from Esau, dreamt of angels, he proclaimed, “Truly, the Lord is in this place and I did not know it!” He was afraid, and said, “How awesome this place is! This is nothing else but the house of God, the gateway to heaven!” (Gen 28:16-17). Jacob did not know where he was; it was God’s presence that made the place holy. Solomon built the temple as a dwelling place for God, a house for the Lord’s name (1 Kgs 8:20). At the same time, he realized God’s omnipresence: “Is God indeed to dwell on earth? If the heavens and the highest heavens cannot contain you, how much less this house which I have built!” (1 Kgs 8:27).

The household of God can also refer to the entire Hebrew people, as in Numbers 12:7. Later tradition recognizes that God is present whenever people come together to pray: “When two sit together and words of Torah pass between them, the Divine Presence rests between them” (*Ethics of the Fathers*, 3:3). Jesus said, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20).

Saint Paul picks up on this theme when he refers to the Church as Christ’s Body. He explains in 1 Cor. 12:12, 27, “As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ... Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it.” Saint Paul uses the image of the body in several places. In Romans 12:4-5, he says: “For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another.” He reminds us again in Ephesians 5:30 that “we are members of his body.”

In the Rule of Saint Benedict, the term “house of God” it generally refers to the entire monastery, not just the chapel. In Chapter 31 on the cellarer, Benedict states: “The proper times should be observed in giving the things that have to be given and asking for the things that have to be asked for, that no one may be troubled or vexed in the house of God.” In Chapter 64, Benedict provides for the removal of an unfit abbot or abbess and for the installation of “a worthy steward over the house of God.” In Chapter 53, on the reception of guests, Benedict is concerned that “the house of God be managed by prudent men and in a prudent manner.”

For Benedict, residing in the house of God, being a member of Christ’s household, demands that certain behavioral standards be maintained. Benedict echoes Paul’s word of caution to Timothy:

“You should know how to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of truth” (1 Tim 3:15). The monastery is to be a place of peace and love. It is to be governed prudently so as to prevent distraction, worry, or agitation. It should provide an environment that enables prayer, silence, and recollection.

A church building is a house of God; Jacob’s 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. The phrase reminds us that the chapel is a sacred place. More important, it reminds us that we ourselves are the house of God, and we are to revere one another. We open the gates of heaven when we extend hospitality, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness to the members of Christ’s body.

A word to our Wyoming oblates. As you surely realize, closing San Benito Monastery was a difficult and painful decision for the Congregation. It is a time of transition and adjustment for the sisters, oblates, and friends of the Dayton community. Please keep Sisters Gladys, Regina, Josetta, and Hope in your hearts and prayer, and be assured that all of us are praying for you. You are still our oblates and belong to the Congregation. We will find ways to keep you involved and informed; you'll hear from me soon.

And now the news:

Clyde oblates just be patient. I will let you know the dates of the Lenten and spring meetings in my next letter.

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.