



*The Benedictine Oblate Letter*

*September, 2014*

Dear Oblates and Friends,

Last month I wrote about the primary reason one chooses the monastic way of life: to seek God. Newcomers, who are usually idealistic and enthusiastic in their search, are told “all the hard and rugged ways by which the journey to God is made.” They need to realize that every so often the journey will seem bleak and wearisome. They require strength to remain firm in their calling.

When we become discouraged, it may be that our expectations of individuals or situations are unrealistically high. I am reminded of the phrase, “I never promised you a rose garden.” This is the name of a novel by Joanne Greenberg and of a 1977 movie that was based on it. I learned by googling that it is similar to the name of a song by Joe Smith. The refrain, which I personally find less than inspired, is:

I didn't promise you a rose garden

Along with the sunshine

There's gotta be some rain sometimes

Watch out

I didn't promise you a rose garden (Yeah)

Along with the sunshine

There's gotta be some rain sometimes

Listen, ok

Benedict does not promise us a rose garden, but neither did he want life to be too difficult for his monks. Not all of us are strong. Some are more determined than others. In Chapter 64 of his

Rule, Benedict cautions the abbot or prioress: “In administering correction she should act prudently and not go to excess, lest in seeking too eagerly to scrape off the rust she break the vessel.” In Chapter 48, Benedict writes: Let all things be done with moderation, however, for the sake of the faint-hearted.”

Benedict exercises the same prudence with regard to material goods and the temporal welfare of his monks. He is concerned that their legitimate needs be met, and that special care be given to the elderly and infirm. We read in Chapter 34, “Whether All Should Receive in Equal Measure What Is Necessary”: “Let us follow the Scripture, ‘Distribution was made to each according as anyone had need’ (Acts 4:35). By this we do not mean that there should be respecting of persons (which God forbid), but consideration for infirmities.”

For Benedict, there should be no cause for complaining, which he considers evil. Help is to be given to those who need it, so that they may perform their duties with a peaceful heart. If the community is large, the cellarer, who provides for the monks and guests, is to be given helpers that by their assistance he may fulfill with a quiet mind the office committed to him” (Chapter 31). In Chapter 53, “On the Reception of Guests,” we find: “Let them be given such help as they need, that they may serve without murmuring.” In Chapter 66, “Should the porter need help, let her have one of the younger sisters.”

Despite all these provisions, it may happen that a monk is asked to do something that he or she considers too difficult, or even impossible. In this case, Benedict stipulates in Chapter 68: “Let her submit the reasons for her inability to the one who is over her in a quiet way and at an opportune time, without pride, resistance, or contradiction.”

Benedict acknowledges that the monastic life is not easy. In the Prologue, he refers to “a certain strictness [that] results from the dictates of equity for the amendment of vices or the preservation of charity.” He does not want his monks to give up too easily. That is why he urges perseverance. Stability, commitment to the monastery, is the matter of a vow (Chapter 58). Any commitment takes a certain quality to stick-to-itiveness. Let us pray for the grace of perseverance when the way is difficult.

*And now the news:*

*By the time you receive this letter, the fall retreat at will be over.* Fourteen oblates are expected to attend.

*St. Louis area oblates are meeting monthly.* Meetings are held on the third Saturday of the month at the St. Rose Philippine Duchesne parish office.

Peace,

*Sr. Sarah, O.S.B.*