



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

September, 2015

Dear Oblates and Friends,

Many of us are following the visit of Pope Francis over the Internet, television, or radio. Also, after five months of waiting, a new bishop has been appointed for the Kansas City-Saint Joseph diocese: Bishop James V. Johnston of the Springfield-Cape Girardeau, Missouri, diocese. All of this got me wondering about the role of the hierarchy in the Rule of Saint Benedict.

Benedict's view of the church is expansive and inclusive. He refers three times (Chapters 33, 34, 55) to the early church as it is described in the Acts of the Apostles: "The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common." Nevertheless, Benedict mentions the local bishop twice. In Chapter 62, "On the Priests of the Monastery," Benedict refers to a priest who has entered the monastery but then fails to obey its rules: "If he does not reform after repeated admonitions, let even the Bishop be brought in as a witness." Then, in Chapter 64, "On Constituting an Abbot," Benedict writes: "If (which God forbid) the whole community should agree to choose a person who will acquiesce in their vices, and if those vices somehow become known to the bishop to whose diocese the place belongs, or to the Abbots or the faithful of the vicinity, let them prevent the success of this conspiracy of the wicked, and set a worthy steward over the house of God."

In the days of Saint Benedict there was no fixed pattern as to how to choose an abbot or abbess. In addition, scholars do not agree on the role of the bishop in this matter. What is clear is that the abbot or abbess is a charismatic leader whose authority comes from God, not from the community. For this reason, Benedict says in Chapter 2, "She is believed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery, being called by a name of his, which is taken from the words of the Apostle: 'You have received a Spirit of adoption ..., by virtue of which we cry, 'Abba – Father.'"

Charismatic leadership has its own problems, but in these days of tedious, endless political debate and wrangling, it is worthy of note that the election of a monastic superior is not political in nature. Of course, human nature being what it is, it is naïve to think that politics never enters into decision-making. However, Benedict is concerned that the right leader be chosen. An abbot or abbess must “a worthy steward over the house of God” (RB 64). In Chapter Two, the abbot is described as a father and shepherd, one who has undertaken the government of souls and who is accountable to God for those entrusted to his care.

All political candidates should read the Rule of Saint Benedict. Some might decide to drop out of the race altogether. Others might even change the tone of their campaign rhetoric.

A suggestion (repeated):

The sisters of Sacred Heart Monastery, Yankton, South Dakota, have an online oblate chapter that enables any oblate to communicate with other oblates from around the world without changing the monastery of affiliation. The link is <http://yanktonbenedictines.org/oblates/online-chapter>. From there just follow the directions at the bottom of the page.

Now the news:

Clyde oblates For various reasons, the oblate weekend scheduled for September 25-27, 2015, had to be cancelled. The next oblate weekend will be during Lent. I will let you know the precise dates as soon as I can.

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 up to Chapter 4, “The Tools for Good Works.” 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 have received updates concerning Sr. Pascaline, who fell and broke her neck. She had successful surgery on September 15 and is doing well. She needs to wear a neck

brace for the next three months or so. Thanks be to God, she suffered no permanent damage and a full, although prolonged, recovery is expected. Do keep her in prayer.

The next meeting is on October 4, 2015, and I will be there. The group has chosen *In the Heart of the Temple: My Spiritual Vision for Today's World* by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB, as the next book to read and discuss.

Sheridan, Wyoming, oblates resume their meetings this Saturday, before you will receive this letter. They normally 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. They are discussing Pope Francis' encyclical on ecology, *Laudato Si'*, in the light of the Rule of Saint Benedict.

Peace,

Sr. Sarah