



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

September, 2016

Dear Oblates and Friends,

I've been thinking of blessing and blessings in my life and in my community. Every Sunday, at the conclusion of Morning Prayer, three sisters extricate themselves from their choir stalls and stand in the center aisle of the chapel. Two of the three are the table servers who are beginning their week of serving, and one is the reader for the week. The brief ritual for the servers is described in Chapter 35 of the Rule:

Let the server who is ending his week say this verse: "Blessed are You, O Lord God, who have helped me and consoled me." When this has been said three times and the outgoing server has received his blessing, then let the incoming server follow and say, "Incline unto my aid, O God; O Lord, make haste to help me." Let this also be repeated three times by all, and having received his blessing let him enter his service.

The reader's blessing is found in Chapter 38:

Let this incoming reader, after Mass and Communion, ask all to pray for her that God may keep her from the spirit of pride And let her intone the following verse, which shall be said three times by all in the oratory: "O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall declare Your praise." Then, having received a blessing, let her enter on the reading.

At Clyde, we have adapted these blessings somewhat so as to avoid repetition. We have also added the travelers' blessing after these. Those who are travelling, whether on vacation or to a meeting, and those who will be making retreat ("a spiritual journey"), also stand in the center aisle. This blessing is mentioned in Chapter 67:

Let the brethren who are sent on a journey commend themselves to the prayers of all the brethren and of the Abbot; and always at the last prayer of the Work of God let a commemoration be made of all absent brethren.

Since Benedict did not provide the wording of the traveler's blessing, we have composed one for our own use. We also pray for our absent sisters in the concluding versicles of Day Hour.

Benedict tells us that these blessings are to be given in chapel. Thus he sanctifies the service rendered by the monks to one another, and hopes to protect those who are away from the monastery from worldly temptations and dangers. Blessings are given by the abbot, by the senior, guests, visitors, priests, and by all the members of the community. We bless one another. It is one way to remain a united, prayerful community and to be mindful of the Lord's presence in one another. Blessings are a sign of our respect, gratitude, and love for one another.

In Roman Catholic tradition, there is both a narrow, liturgical definition of blessings and a broader understanding. Blessings sometimes come under the category of sacramental. These blessings then come under the authority of the Church and must therefore be performed by a qualified minister.

Among sacramentals *blessings* (of persons, meals, objects, and places) come first. Every blessing praises God and prays for his gifts. In Christ, Christians are blessed by God the Father "with every spiritual blessing." This is why the Church imparts blessings by invoking the name of Jesus, usually while making the holy sign of the cross of Christ. (paragraph 1671).

Nevertheless, blessings are also expressions of intercession and praise. In this sense, we can all bless each other and all things. We bless the food we eat, and all who partake of it. We bless ourselves with the sign of the cross, perhaps with holy water. We may bless children and grandchildren, family members, and close friends. We may bless the beauty of God's creation, and give God thanks. Think of the ways you can bless others and all created things. You can be a blessing to the world.

And now the news:

The International Congress of Benedictine Oblates will meet Nov. 4-10, 2017, in Rome. The theme is *A Way Forward: the Benedictine Community in Movement*. I have no more information at present; hopefully more information will be forthcoming. If anyone is interested, please let me know.

Clyde oblates enjoyed the September meeting on the theme of blessing. We welcomed the presence of Michael Schroeder, a Tucson oblate. The next Clyde weekend is scheduled for March 24-26, 2017, during Lent. The theme is yet to be determined, and more information will be forthcoming.

Saint Louis area oblates: The Saint Louis group has been reading and discussing *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB. They have also been doing group *lectio* following *Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, “Lectio Divina Shared in Community” by Fr. Luke Dysinger, O.S.B. 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).

Sand Springs oblates have resumed their monthly meetings. The group is reading and discussing Sr. Joan Chittister’s book *In the Heart of the Temple*. The group has been praying for Sr. Priscilla, who lived for many years at Osage Monastery. By now, you have all heard about Sr. Priscilla’s death, She had turned 100 in August. Pray for her and the community.

Sheridan, Wyoming, oblates have also resumed their monthly meetings, and have welcomed two new inquirers.

Tucson oblates are meeting monthly after taking a break for the summer. Chapter 4 of the Rule, “The Tools of Good Works,” has been chosen as the theme for this year’s meetings.

Peace,

Sr. Sarah