



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

September, 2017

Dear Oblates and Friends,

For several days, like many of you, I paid close attention to the projected path of Hurricane Irma. I have a brother who lives near Fort Lauderdale. Other sisters also have relatives and friends in Florida, and they were similarly anxious and concerned for their welfare. I had assured my brother and sister-in-law of my prayer and that of the community. Sure enough, the storm turned west; the wind that hit their area was half of what had been predicted. Even though they lost power, they are confident that our prayers were responsible for the positive turn of events.

We pray many intercessions every day. We have intercessions at the conclusion of Lauds and Vespers. These intercessions correspond to the litanies that Saint Benedict prescribes in his description of the Liturgy of the Hours in chapters 8-19 of his Rule. We also pray for our absent sisters at the end of Day Hour, as Benedict legislates in Chapter 67: “Always at the last prayer of the Work of God let a commemoration be made of all absent brethren.”

It might be helpful to consider the times that Saint Benedict urges us to pray. Toward the beginning the Prologue, Benedict tells us, “First of all, whatever good work you begin to do, beg of him with most earnest prayer to perfect it.” Benedict repeats the same instruction further on in the Prologue when he says, “We must prepare our hearts and our bodies to do battle under the holy obedience of His commands; and let us ask God that he be pleased to give us the help of his grace for anything which our nature finds hardly possible.” Praying before beginning work is a spiritual practice can be recommended to anyone. It reminds us that we can do nothing without God’s grace. What would it be like for us to begin every chore or project with a short prayer asking God to help us in the task at hand?

We should also consider Benedict’s instructions regarding those for whom we should pray. We need to pray for those who stray from the right path. In Chapter 28 of the Rule, “On Those Who Will Not Amend after Repeated Corrections,” Benedict says, “if she [the superior] sees that her efforts are of no avail, let her apply a still greater remedy, her own prayers and those of all the others, that the Lord, who can do all things may restore health to the sister who is sick.”

The entire community is to pray not only for the guests, but also with them. We read in Chapter 53, “On the Reception of Guests”: “First of all let them pray together, and then exchange the kiss of peace.” In Benedict’s time, the kiss of peace may have been used as a means to avoid welcoming heretics. We don’t have the same concern and welcome all who come to pray with us.

We also pray for those who go on a journey. Benedict says 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.” Our sisters who will be traveling receive a blessing at the end of Lauds on Sunday. Travel can be a hassle. Perhaps a blessing may help prevent cancellations or delays at the airport.

Do all these intercessions work? I believe they do. We just don’t know how, when, and where they work. We do know why they work: God is faithful and merciful.

And now the news:

Tucson oblates:

The September 17 meeting marked the transition of the oblates’ meeting place from the Benedictine Monastery to St. Philip’s-in-the-Hills Episcopal Church. I was glad to be present for the occasion and to meet the oblates. The meeting began at the monastery with blessing ritual. Candles were lit. This was followed by a simple service that included readings, psalms, and prayers. The candles were then snuffed out and we all proceeded to St. Philip’s, where the candles were re-lit. We were greeted by the clergy and some St. Philip’s parishioners. There were refreshments and brief tours of the St. Philip’s campus. Many thanks to the deans and all who worked to make this a meaningful ritual! I am confident that the Tucson oblates will continue to be a vital group even after the sisters have left.

Phoenix oblates meet at Mount Claret Retreat Center, 4633 N. 54th St. Phoenix, 85018. The meeting room is the Saint John Paul II room in the back of the parking lot. The Phoenix oblates will continue their study of the Rule of Benedict by Maria-Thomas Beil, OSB.

West Side Phoenix oblates—this is a new chapter in Phoenix. Oblates meet for a morning of prayer, study, community and fellowship. They meet at 19204 N. 70th Avenue, Glendale, on the third Saturday of the month from 9-12am. In August the meeting will be on the second Saturday of the month. For information call Lisa at 623-374-2382.

Clyde oblates: The fall weekend will be held from October 20-22. The theme will be *Chutes and Ladders: Humility in Scripture and the Rule of Benedict*. Further information will be forthcoming.

Saint Louis area oblates: The Saint Louis group has been 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, OSB. 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: The Sand Springs oblates resumed their meetings on September 10. They are introducing a new book for this year: *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* by Richard Rohr. This book looks at the Trinity as dancing within all.

Sheridan, Wyoming, oblates resume their meetings on September 16. After that the group will meet the on the first and third Saturdays of the month through May. On third Saturdays, the group will discuss Joan Chittister’s new book, *Radical Spirit*, on the steps of humility. On first Saturdays the group resume their study of the *Study Guide for the Rule of St. Benedict with Reflections for Oblates* by Sr. Maria-Thomas Beil, OSB.

Peace,

Sr. Sarah, O.S.B.