



*The Benedictine Oblate Letter*

*September, 2018*

Dear Oblates and Friends,

When we watch the news on television or listen to it on the radio, we find that it is full of terrible things: murders, wars, civil conflict, natural disasters, displaced people seeking refuge. We may feel depressed and helpless, thinking that there is nothing we can do. What does Benedict have to say about our response to injustice and inequality in our contemporary world? Does he even address such questions?

Benedict was born around 480, a few years after the collapse of the Roman Empire in the West. During most of his life, Rome was ruled by the Ostrogoths, a Germanic people who came under the dominion of the Huns. Life was difficult, and Benedict was surely aware of the inequalities in Roman society. Wealthy Romans enjoyed an extravagant lifestyle with luxurious furnishings, surrounded by slaves who catered to their every desire. The poor lived in shabby, squalid houses. At times, they would abandon newborn babies to the streets, hoping that someone would take them in as servants or slaves.

Benedict did not become involved in the wider society, which he viewed as depraved and corrupt. Saint Gregory tells us in his *Dialogues* that, when sent to Rome to further his education:

As much as he saw many by reason of such learning fall to dissolute and lewd life, he drew back his foot, which he had as it were now set forth into the world, lest, entering too far in acquaintance with it, he likewise might have fallen into that dangerous and godless gulf.  
(*Dialogues*, Book 2, Prologue, <http://www.osb.org/gen/greg/>).

Benedict fled and “went into a desert place called Subiaco” (Chapter One). After a time, he went to a monastery at Vicovaro to serve as abbot, but the monks there tried to poison him. Then he went to Montecassino, where he founded a monastery and an order that has lasted for over 1500 years.

Benedict’s withdrawal from the world is reflected in his Rule. In Chapter 66, “On the Porters of the Monastery,” he writes:

If it can be done, the monastery should be so established that all the necessary things, such as water, mill, garden and various workshops, may be within the enclosure, so that there is no necessity for the sisters to go about outside of it, since that is not at all profitable for their souls.

If, on occasion, the monks do leave the monastery on necessary business, they are not to speak of their adventures upon their return: “Let no one presume to tell another whatever he may have seen or heard outside of the monastery, because this causes very great harm” (Chapter 67, “On Brethren who Are Sent on a Journey”).

Benedict set forth rules of enclosure in order to establish a self-contained community modeled on the early Christian community. Several times he quotes from Acts 4, in which Luke describes this community. For instance, with regard to the distribution of material goods, Benedict writes: “Let all things be common to all, as it is written, and let no one say or assume that anything is his own” (Chapter 33). Again in the next chapter, he says, “Let us follow the Scripture, ‘Distribution was made to each according as anyone had need’” (Acts 4:35) (<http://archive.osb.org/rb/text>).

We may learn from Benedict that it is important to shun what is evil and corrupt. At the very least, we can avoid participating in what is unjust. On a more positive note, we can build communities of justice, mercy, compassion, and love. At least in that way our light will shine in the darkness.

***And now the news:***

### ***Clyde Oblates***

The fall weekend, September 14-16, focused on *The Monastic Impulse: The Development of Benedictine Spirituality*. We began with a discussion of the women followers of Jesus, including Mary Magdalene, and then considered the desert mothers. The afternoon was a reflection on Saint Scholastica, using the stories about her found in the *Dialogues of Saint Gregory* to ponder her spirituality.

### ***Tucson Oblates***

The Tucson oblates meet on the third Sunday of the month at St. Phillips of the Hills at 2:00pm in the Murphy Gallery East. Candidates meet at 12:45pm in Ferguson. The deans meet monthly on the Saturday following the regular meeting. If you have any questions for the deans, please email [tucsonoblates@gmail.com](mailto:tucsonoblates@gmail.com) or call 520-664-5136. Anyone wanting to participate in a discussion of the book *Saint Benedict's Toolbox* may come to the Murphy Gallery East at 12:45pm.

***Phoenix Central:*** The Phoenix group meets in the St. John Paul II room at the Mount Claret Retreat Center, 4633 N. 54<sup>th</sup> Street. For information call Patty Williams 602-957-1464.

***West Phoenix:*** The West Phoenix group meets in Glendale for a morning of prayer, community, and fellowship on the third Saturday of the month from 9:00 am-12pm. For information call Lisa Hughes at 623-374-2382.

***East Valley:*** The East Valley Oblates meet on the fourth Saturday of the month. The next meeting is on September 22. For information call Nancy Kaib 480-883-8025 or Frank Young 480-219-1505.

***Sand Springs:***

The oblates meet on the first Sunday of the month at 11:30 am in the Bede Building. The group is continuing their discussion of *The Divine Dance* by Richard Rohr and how it connects with the Rule. Visitors are always welcome.

***Sheridan, Wyoming:***

Meetings are now on Monday nights. For information, contact Cel Hope at celhaus@fiberpipe.net, or email me at sarah@bspa.us or phone me at 660-944-2221.

Peace,

Sr. Sarah