



Tucson Oblate Newsletter

April, 2015



Since I am writing in Holy Week, I hope you may be able to take some time considering how the Rule of Benedict reflects the solemn liturgical celebrations of the Paschal Triduum. For example, the great symbol of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples on Holy Thursday dramatizes the themes of servanthood and humility so dear to Benedict, especially in the chapters about the Abbot (Chs. 2, 27, 64). Good Friday has many themes, among them forgiveness and "quietly embracing suffering" (Ch. 13, last paragraph and Ch. 7, 4th degree of humility). For Easter I leave you to your own exploration!

In the coming months I will be turning over responsibilities of leadership of the Oblates to Sr. Hope Rodenborn, who joined us recently when the Wyoming monastery closed. Hopefully, in the near future Hope and I can visit our chapters in Phoenix and Prescott, but nothing is in place yet. Present plans are that Srs. Hope, Joan Therese and I will be a team working together, as my health currently limits my participation. My involvement with the Oblates over the past 14 years is a wonderful source of personal enrichment and I hope to continue contributing as much as I can.

At the March meeting, we were treated to an excellent presentation by our Prioress General, Sr. Dawn Annette Mills. She began by talking about the basic values of the Rule: balance, gentleness toward self and others, and especially using the community for growth. She described how the monastic community spreads to include the Oblates, the communities of which Oblates are members, those who pray with the monastic community, those who ask for the community's prayers, and ultimately all beings in the world. We are, she said, all a part of the great community of creation. As members of a group, we have not arrived when the first person reaches our destination, but when the last one does.

Sr. Dawn then went on to talk about the vow of *conversatio*. This is the term Benedict used, although it was thought for a time that he said *conversio*. The goal of *conversio* is conversion, proselytizing, asking someone else to join our group and be just like us. The goal of *conversatio* is conversation. First of all, this means a conversation with God, "listening to what God says, replying with praise, and putting what God says and one responds into action." (see: www.idahomonks.org/sect805.htm) Secondly, it is evangelization, letting others see the Gospel through us, and letting God work in their lives as God wishes. Really, we can't convert others, we can only enter into conversation that helps each participant understand and support the other. This kind of exchange can overcome obstacles and lead to a change of heart.

Conversatio is part of the Benedictine wisdom tradition. We are, Sr. Dawn said, a "wisdom people." Benedictine wisdom focuses on one day at a time, on the everyday, not the glamorous. Benedictine life, she added, is not an exotic flower. It is "dandelions, mud pies, homemade bread." It is fidelity in the little things, good days and bad, getting up in the morning and showing up for prayer whether one wants to or not. Benedictines don't work until all work is finished, because it will never be finished. They do what they can during the time for work, and pray when it is time to pray. Each day is a new start, but also a new challenge. God is in the daily, and the Benedictine way is to find God there. Benedictine prayer, the repetition of the psalms, is meant to be boring because we are doing it for God, not to satisfy our own wish for something novel. It is an exercise in faithfulness, done out of love and not for entertainment—"but every once in a while, God throws something new in" and we are granted a new insight. Recognizing this, along with loving the sameness of the prayer, takes maturity.

Sr. Dawn said that she sees trees as an example of wisdom. Wisdom herself is described as the tree of life (Prov. 3:17-19). Many times the Bible speaks of trees (see Genesis, the tree in the Garden of Eden; the tree at Calvary; the oak at Mamre where Abraham was promised a son and later pleaded for the people of Sodom; the tree in 1 Kings that sheltered Elijah; the trees that never fade in Ezekiel 47:7-12 and Revelation 22:1-5. Psalm 1 and Jeremiah 17 compare the righteous person to a tree that is planted by the running waters. Our desert trees know how to tap into the underground sources of water, and how to adapt to the desert climate. God knows where the water for our lives is, and plants us there. "If I have been planted here, I have to believe that there is water, whether I see it or not, and we will bear the fruits of the Spirit [see Galatians 5:22-23], each day, all year around."

Sr. Dawn challenged us each to think about what kind of tree I am at this point in my life. What is going on with my tree? What color is it? What season is it in? What fruit am I bearing?

TUCSON: Next meeting Sunday April 19, at 2:00 p.m. Doors open at 1:00 for inquirers, candidates and anyone else who would like to come early, use the library, and/or visit with others.)

1:15 Oblate candidates and inquirers meet upstairs in prayer room (1st door on right after you enter chapel). **Jessie Zander** will lead the sharing. In preparation, read from the Rule of Benedict: Ch. 18 *The Order of the Psalmody*, and Ch. 19 *On the Discipline of Psalmody*.

Questions for discussion

1. What questions/comments do you have from last time, or from your reading?
2. What is the importance of prayer in the life of the monastery? In the life of an Oblate?
3. Have you had experience praying the office? Praying with psalms? What benefits and challenges did you encounter? How would you apply to daily life Benedict's statement that "Nothing should be preferred to the Work of God."

Reminder to candidates or inquirers ready for enrollment or oblation May 17: papers are out for you to sign if you are ready to go ahead. Sylvia Aguayo and Paul Mather are eligible for Oblation, as is Carole Ambroziak who completed her year of preparation several years ago.

2:00: We are happy to have as presenter our Tucson Oblate, **Rachel Srubas**, who made her Oblation here in 2001. She is a Presbyterian clergywoman and the author of three books on Christian spiritual life. She regularly contributes written reflections to *Give Us This Day*, a personal prayer periodical published by Liturgical Press at St. John's (Benedictine) Abbey. She offered the following introduction to her presentation.

A Constant Letting Go: *Conversatio Morum* for Benedictine Oblates

The Rule of Benedict (58:17) says about the vows an individual makes when entering monastic life: "When s/he is to be received, s/he comes before the whole community in the oratory and promises stability, fidelity to monastic life, and obedience." "Fidelity to monastic life" is the customary English translation of Benedict's Latin phrase, *conversatio morum suorum*, although a closer literal translation is "conversion of life." Oblates of St. Benedict commit to following the Rule of Benedict insofar as their station in life allows, but oblates are not vowed monastics.

What, then, is an oblate's relationship with the Benedictine promises? And more particularly, what can the vow of "fidelity to monastic life" mean to a non-vowed, non-monastic follower of Benedict's Rule? Rachel will talk about some meanings of Benedictine *conversatio morum*, and its everyday relevance to anyone seeking to let go of unhelpful attachments and be transformed into the likeness of Christ.

We plan to pray Vespers at the end of this meeting, so please bring your Benedictine Handbook with you, if you have one.

Library News:

Thanks to generous donors, we have many new books in the library. We will also be holding book sales monthly,

rather than holding them just on renewal days. Prices have been dropped to \$1 for hardbacks and 50 cents for paperbacks.

Some people are behind on returning books. They are asked to please bring them back. They are also reminded of our \$1 fine per month policy for overdue books.

PRESCOTT: Next meeting Sunday, April 19, 1:30-3:30 p.m., St. Anthony Claret Room

Shirley Maday writes: We shared on Michael Casey's book, "*The Road to Eternal Life*," chapters 10 and 11. Chapter 10 spoke of avoiding hardness of heart which is the opposite of the open and childlike disposition recommended in the gospels. Casey stated that ongoing familiarity with God's word enables us to recognize the voice of God in the events of life more easily. Chapter 11 spoke of the call to holiness. We are to read God's word in the Scripture as our guide in doing good and avoiding evil.

Lesson for the next meeting: Michael Casey's book, *The Road to Eternal Life*, pp 43-50.

For more information, call Nancy Hinshaw: 928-445-1271

PHOENIX CENTRAL: Next meeting, Saturday, April 11, 2015, 8:45 a.m. for Inquirers and Candidates, and 9:30 a.m. for all. Mount Claret Retreat Center, 4633 North 54th Street, Phoenix, 85018.

Patty Williams writes: Please join us for a morning of prayer, community, God stories and study. In March we celebrated the enrollment of Susan Pease in the chapel at Mount Claret. We are blessed!

For more information: call Patty Williams: 602-957-1464 or email Benedictine@cox.net

PHOENIX EAST VALLEY: Next meeting Saturday, April 25.

Nancy Kaib writes: The East Valley Benedictine Oblates met on March 28. The lesson was on a CD on which the author discusses the final seven statements made by Christ while on the cross.

In April and the next few months, our meetings will focus on living out the Benedictine way. We will see DVDs on how various Benedictine Monasteries live out their monastic life.

For more information: call Nancy Kaib, 480-883-8025 or Frank Young, 480-219-1505

I wish you a most joyful Easter celebration. Continue rejoicing all through the Paschal Season, which doesn't end until May 24 (Pentecost Sunday)!

Alleluia!

Lenora, OSB

