

The Benedictine Oblate Letter

May/June, 2011

Dear Oblates and friends,

Every year, for the nurture of the Christian faith community, we have the wonderful feast-packed months of May and June just ending, all of them revelations of God's abiding Love for creation. In the divine circle of Trinitarian oneness, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we have Mother's Day and Father's Day, and I include these deliberately, because God is for us Source, Sustainer and Sanctifier, "Our Father" and nurturing Mother. And we have the Ascension of Jesus for the glorification of humanity; Jesus is our "bright hope of glory", ALL of us running the path together yet separate, "one, though many parts" till we realize the oneness that already exists beyond our present scope of vision and understanding.

Then, we've had Pentecost and the mystery of a Spirit-filled people of God, empowered, if we only knew it, by Christ's living Love in and through us, permeating the world ever so subtly as we **become** Eucharist, Body and Blood of Christ, Corpus Christi, one of our most beloved feasts. The solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is another festival celebrating our growing awareness of how immense is God's love for the whole of creation, but especially for we who are drawn into Christ and Christ into us in the mystery of incorporation we call Baptism.

God is the immense Joy pumping the heart of the universe. Embrace that Love and share it as your life-project. Caught up in these liturgical feasts that celebrate both God's mysteries and ours, since we are made one in the One, let's be happy, dear ones, in the beauty of our faith and our community of love and care, wherever we find them, and bond with God's holy People. Your Oblate life is **one** way of responding to the impress, the sign, made on you by the Father, drawing you on "the Way" through Christ in the power of the Spirit as the Kingdom grows day by day.

I pray every day that this joy is not diminished or blocked completely from our awareness despite the corruption, sordidness and misery so evident in our world. These will still exist side by side till Love wins and evil or "Satan" is demolished. Then only Love and maturity, the "full stature of Christ", will rise out of the ashes of the woundedness in ourselves and in the world. We must go on walking with Christ who lights the path ahead of us by the Spirit's bright love and joy. Trust God's Word on this.

There are many people who say they no longer are sure they believe in a God, let alone a God of Love and Mercy because all they see and experience is the misery and emptiness in the world around them. They say they cannot pray or

even believe in the spiritual realities that are intended to sustain us, like the manna in the desert, on our journey. Perhaps we've all gone through such dark days (or years, like Mother Teresa!). Well, walk in the dark, then! Walk on in Faith. God NEVER abandons us! God cannot and will not because we are in God and God in us inseparably by our Baptism.

I realize prayer and the awareness of God's Presence doesn't come easy unless we are fed daily at the table of God's bounty. For many people, prayer is like learning to speak a difficult foreign language. It would be like me, without ever hearing it spoken, trying to speak fluid Mandarin.

The words of the psalms can't comfort those who don't know how to translate them let alone make them their own language of the heart, yet they are some of the most beautiful and nurturing words ever written. They give voice to our numbed mind when we cry out for the safety and comfort of not being alone any longer in the dark. They sing in us when our joy is overflowing at what God is doing when life continually surprises us, or when we get a sudden glimpse of the Love behind all our loves.

Remember, prayer is not so much a thing we do as a relationship. It's as simple as a smile from the heart, a soft sigh of wonder, a wordless look of endearment. Monastic spirituality puts a high priority on Lectio Divina, holy reading, with a predilection for Sacred Scripture, taking the time to let our soul be fed, and sanctifying the hours of each day. Connectedness with the Holy is the blossom and prayer is the fruit of that daily Lectio. It's the foundation of our love life with God, so I pray you won't ignore it or put it at the bottom of your day's agenda.

Go easy on yourself, though; pushing hard to pray doesn't make God listen anymore attentively; forcing the unnatural doesn't either. Take a cue from what your body is telling you. If you need sleep, make that your prayer and rest in God's arms. Go with the spontaneous rather than listening to some inner "should". Find what fits the moment or abandon words altogether and just look at God with the eyes of your heart.

In times of great stress some people find help from holding a sacred object, like a crucifix or a candle. Playing devotional music that has always spoken to your soul might help re-center you in your upset state. Make a certain word or short phrase a "mantra" to replace runaway thoughts throughout the day. Saying over and over the little prayers learned in childhood might help since at any given point we are all inwardly children and always will be, with a loving Father to hold us. Have a good laugh with me as I recall an incident in my childhood when I was in a situation of great physical danger. I just knew I was going to die, so I folded my hands to pray, waiting for death, and all I could say over and over, babbling in my little trembling voice was "Hail Mary, Hail Mary, Hail Mary." That was better than "Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts", right?

Either way, God gets the picture!

Having a good cry releases a great deal of tension for some and we regain perspective on what troubles us. Aiming little "arrow prayers" at the Divine Heart could get one through a bad patch, too. For example: *Help me, God. I trust in you.* Or, *God, speak in and through me here. I need you!* Or, *My Jesus, mercy!* Or any simple ejaculation memorized long ago.

Strangest of all to suggest is, don't try to pray at all. To go for a walk, knowing you have Jesus with you as a Companion, or go out of yourself to meet someone else's need at the time; this can break the obsessive focus on our troubles, at least till God knows we're ready to face them again. God's timing and manner of healing will always be the best for us, so in all things, let's put absolute trust in the divine Mercy, leaving things in God's hands. We will, feel it or not, be walking into the Light, like Lazarus coming out of the dark, dank tomb into the bright light of day at God's voice and insistence.

Peace to you. And always our love and prayers for you and yours. Have a great Summer.

Sister Jean Frances

The Benedictine Oblate Letter **October/November, 2011**

Dear Oblates and Friends,

Here we are in the Fall of the year and I hope you find beauty in it. After the terrible storm of a few months ago here at Clyde there aren't many leaves left on the trees still standing to turn colors for our enjoyment and inspiration. But for what we have left we thank the good God and also those of you who came (and are still coming) to our assistance financially. Not all of our losses, by far, can be covered by insurance, so we want to let you know how very grateful we are for your help. Please keep us in your prayers and continue to help us out of your pocket books as the bewildering multitude of repairs are just beginning.

Due to many factors I have been unable to write for a while and am still unable, so I decided to be simple about it, beg for your patience and repeat some of what I wrote years ago in October on the subject of holy leisure. I'll keep it as brief as possible because, as you will see, the other side of this Letter is an important piece of community news. Thanks, dear ones, and God hold you gently always.

Michael Casey says: "Leisure is not idleness or the pursuit of recreational activities. It is, above all, being attentive to the present moment, open to all its implications, living it to the full. This implies a certain looseness in lifestyle that allows the heart and mind to drift away from time to time." Leisure relaxes life's tensions, enables us to step back a bit from the constant demands of responsibilities. Leisure is those quiet, unstressed moments we find here and there in our day, such as times of transition from one thing to another.

A holy life does not expect or demand what Casey calls "shoe-horning the maximum number of good works into a day." From our monastic point of view, centered as it is on God, it's more important to do a few things well than to rush and cram "good deeds" into every twenty four hours. That could simply be our need to feel good about ourselves as loving and generous persons. Motivations need to be looked at periodically. Remember, God is not counting!

As a teenager I once had a date rush me home from a prom because I hadn't prayed Matins yet and it was almost midnight! You can imagine what that did to the relationship. I laugh at myself now and at the folly of compartmentalizing life into times and things holy or otherwise. The goal for all of us is to be like Jesus our model, the embodiment of the hidden Father. We want to be divinely human and humanly divine.

Life itself is holy - all of it, if we are seeing from the heart. To be holy and wholesome life needs balance and space for all the elements of reality to be valued and honored by attention as well as goodwill.

Holy leisure, then, is a type of silence, a space for real presence in and to the content of the moment. Monastics are committed to a life of mindfulness as opposed to helter skelter, mindless rush and bother. As Casey writes: "In a world where communication is huge it takes a fair amount of resolution to create for oneself a sphere of silence in which external urgencies are put on hold and words are weighed. Just as it's important for us to make quality time for the people we love, so we need to reserve some moments to listen to ourselves and God and to life itself. We are all in God's dear hands.

In His vast love I remain your **Sister Jean Frances**



Dear Oblates and friends,

Come New Year 2012, I will be retiring after more than 30 years helping God form Benedictine Oblates affiliated to our BSPA Congregation. It has been a ministry of growth on both sides, I feel sure, and for me, one of the deep joys spanning my middle years, nurturing monastic hearts and walking the way with you.

Age and many health issues have required my living in our health care center. Our Lady of Rickenbach, now and in God's good timing, as Juliann of Norwich would say, "all things are well and all manner of things shall be well." A new Pentecost that brings Fire and Light is always a grace and blessing in all directions.

So I'm writing, asking you to welcome our Sister Mary Sarah Schwartzberg as the new Congregational Coordinator of Oblate Directors and formator of our Congregational Oblates. She is moving from our little monastery at Dayton, Wyoming to take up this role and office here at Clyde with the beginning of the New Year. I'm sure you'll support her, pray for her and most of all enjoy her and the holy gifts she brings to the task.

Sister Sarah will also be the Director of the Oblate group that is affiliated to the Clyde monastery. While missing the Oblate Letter contact and meetings with you, a fresh vision and voice will be a blessing and boost for your Oblate way of life, I feel sure.

You have been such a precious part of my last 30 plus years. I think the world has been richly blest in so many ways because you are in it, living out your oblation with our cherished monastic values. So, be happy, be grateful, feel a new surge of dedication and in turn, bless the world widely, generously, freely, lovingly, prayerfully! God's dear Peace reign in your hearts.

Faithfully, your sister in Christ and our holy Father Benedict,
Sister Jean Frances Dolan. OSB

ADDENDUM:

On behalf of the entire congregation, I want to thank Sr. Jean Frances for the many years she devoted herself to your initial and ongoing formation as our oblates. Under her dedicated care, I know you have received a strong foundation from which to carry on your commitment to the Benedictine way of life. Even as she has been a blessing to you, you have been a blessing to her. Please keep her in your prayers as she deals with various health issues.

I hope you will welcome Sr. Sarah as your new director. She has worked with oblates at our Dayton monastery and taught Scripture classes to various groups besides our women in formation. She has a strong background in both Benedictine and biblical spirituality. She is looking forward to taking up this new ministry.

We feel blessed as a congregation to have so many faithful and devoted oblates. You are a continuing source of blessing for us. Please let us know if you have any suggestions that might strengthen our oblate program. We look forward to the time when the Clyde monastery renovations are complete so we can once again welcome you to the annual oblate retreat.
In Christ who is our life,

Sister Pat Nyquist. OSB Prioress General