



Tucson Oblate Newsletter

November, 2012

At the October meeting of the Tucson Oblates we continued the theme of Compassion with a brief presentation on *Compassion for Yourself*, followed by a half-hour of small group discussion. Judging by the energy coming from these groups, the subject was one that really touched people's hearts and experience. Below are a few thoughts from the opening talk.

Ron Fogarty, a very wise Marist brother and psychologist from Australia, who helped many monastic communities in our country also, reminded us that while we value giving alms to the poor, we are slow to offer the alms of forgiveness to the unlikable and unforgiven parts of ourselves—our “shadow” or whatever we choose to call them. We need to bring those neglected, painful aspects of ourselves into the light and show them compassion, to treat them as Benedict, in Chapter 36 of his Rule, asks us to treat those who are sick.

Forgiving ourselves is not easy. It takes time and patience. Patience is the key—indeed it is the *discipline* of compassion. That word “compassion” can be read as “com-passion” or “com-patience.” since the root of both *passion* and *patience* is the Latin verb *patior*—to suffer. Suffering it is, in a world that wants instant gratification. We hate to wait, and so we often waste waiting times by not being really *present* anywhere. We cannot be present to the future we are waiting for, but our concerns about the future make it impossible to fully aware of the present moment while we are waiting.

Karen Armstrong believes it very important to understand that we humans have two brains. We inherited the “old brain” from the reptiles that emerged some 500 million years ago. They had four drives to enable them to survive: feeding, fighting, fleeing, and reproducing, but human beings evolved a “new brain,” the *neo-cortex*, home of our reasoning powers. The instinctive old-brain passions are automatic responses and are still very much alive, especially when we feel our life is threatened. They are meant to override our more rational new-brain responses in emergency situations, but our new-brain is meant to take over after the emergency, and govern those primitive spontaneous responses. From our new-brain come benevolent emotions such as compassion, joy, serenity, and maternal affection.

For example, after we are suddenly overcome by anger, we need to make choices about what to do with the anger. In Chapter 4 St. Benedict says “Don't let your actions be *governed* by anger or *nurse* your anger

against a future opportunity of indulging it. Don't harbor in your heart any trace of deceit or pretend to be at peace with another when you are not” (4:22-25). There's a big difference between the immediate feeling of anger, and continuing to nurse it, allowing it to govern us. Understanding these dynamics can help us understand and be compassionate in regard to our own feelings, and also in regard to the behavior of others.

PRAYERS (needed and answered): Tucson Oblate **Shirleymae Flake Pajkos** recently fell and broke her pelvis. I promised her our prayers.

Sr. Joan Therese Anderson, who was assisting with the Tucson Oblate formation until she had to be off her feet for several months, has avoided serious ankle surgery and is now walking on her own.

Sr. Lenora is in the process of corneal surgery on both eyes to remove unwanted congenital growths that are obscuring vision. The first eye is now healing well, but it is a slow process, and the second eye will be treated in December. Much patience needed!

TUCSON: Next meeting Sunday, November 18, 2:00 p.m. – Doors open at 1:15

NEW! Oblate inquirers and candidates gather at 1:30 in the PRAYER ROOM on first floor. Enter main chapel, and take first door on your right (there will be a sign on the door). **Bette Dickinson** will lead a discussion on how Chapters 1-6 of the Rule are implemented in the life of an Oblate. Please read Chapters 1-6 of the Rule and *A Life-Giving Way* in preparation. Subjects covered will include:

- What “kind of monk” Benedict would like the Oblate to be
- Servant leadership and participatory governance. Reminder: how listening is important in these.
- Obedience in lay life
- Silence in lay life

Congratulations on the great attendance in October. We are trying to sort out the confusion for which we are sorry, regarding the different editions of the book being used for formation.

Meeting for ALL at 2:00 in Assembly room: Novice Clissene Lewis, the Native American woman living with us at the monastery for the past year, will share

insights on Compassion from her own tradition and from living the Rule of Benedict with us.

By way of preparation, you can reflect on the following excerpt from *Of All Good Gifts*, a statement on stewardship prepared by American Benedictine Religious Women in 1980, the section entitled "Contemplative Vision." It resonates with Karen Armstrong's 4th and 5th *Steps Toward Leading a Compassionate Life: Empathy, and Mindfulness*. While addressed particularly to those living in a monastic community, there is much that can speak to Oblates.

"To see with the heart of Christ is perhaps the best definition of contemplative vision. This contemplative experience is to be nurtured and shared; it makes an essential contribution to the church's call for justice and peace. Contemplation reminds us that before a new earth can be born, we must link our efforts at systemic change with a more fundamental need: transformation of the old person into the new. We as Benedictines have a special imperative in view of our vow of conversion.

"A monastic community . . . seeks to create an environment conducive to mindfulness: awareness of God, self, one another, and the sacredness of creation. It values Eucharist, *lectio*, celebration of the Hours, solitude, silence, and leisure, because these experiences enable the word of God to penetrate the heart and take root. Only then is it possible to uncover one's truest, best self. Contemplatives know that they are made in God's image and that God is love. They are alive then, and so afire with love that participation in violence of any kind is unthinkable.

"A community with a contemplative vision is a center of life; its members are impelled to preserve, cherish, and nurture all that is touched by the Creator's hand. Traditionally, monastic communities have expressed and shared the contemplative vision through prayerful hospitality, reverent use of created goods, and a nonviolent lifestyle.

"Christian community is the refusal to be dominated by things in order to be open to those with whom we live and to have care for the poor. It is not the lack of possessions itself that shapes the Benedictine living of poverty, but the common life, the sharing of spiritual and material goods out of abundance or scarcity . . . all is available to others for the sake of the kingdom. Poverty is for community; it is an eschatological witness."

PRESCOTT: Next Meeting Sunday, November 18, 1:30 p.m., St. Anthony Claret Room. Lesson: *The Monastery of the Heart*, pages 195-219.

In the discussion on *The Monastery of the Heart: Humility and Tools*, we noted that the function of the spiritual life is not to reject our humanity, but to acknowledge our neediness to bring it to fullness. Humility tells us that God is with us and within us always. The Spiritual Tools guide our relationship with God and with the world in which we live.

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

PHOENIX CENTRAL: Next meeting, Saturday, November 10, 2012, 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: The October retreat in Chandler was filled with richness and renewal. We thank Nancy Kaib and the Chandler group for putting it together. We will continue our study of the Holy Rule and we will also talk about a personal evaluation of our oblate life. Please come and join us! Our meeting room is in the back of the Mount Claret Retreat Center in the Pope John Paul II room.

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

PHOENIX EAST VALLEY: Next Meeting, Saturday, November 24.

Nancy Kaib writes: East Valley Benedictine Oblates held their third annual retreat on Saturday, October 27. Some Oblates from Phoenix Central and Prescott also attended. The morning session considered the monastic practice of 'mindfulness' and how that practice will improve our attempts to hear God in *Lectio Divina*. In the afternoon we discussed the Medal of St. Benedict and how being an Oblate has affected our lives. We looked at taking a personal evaluation of where we are in our Oblate lives and where we feel we need to go in the year ahead.

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

I wish you many blessings for Thanksgiving Day!

Love, Sr. Lenora, OSB

