



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

July, 2015

Dear Oblates and Friends,

There is an ancient commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy that explains that it was not God who chose Israel. Rather, the other nations refused to accept the Torah when it was presented to them. This rejection is explained in part by the prohibitions that those nations were unable to accept. One nation rejected the prohibition of murder, another rejected that of theft, others rejected that of adultery. But when God asked the Jewish people if they would accept the Torah, they asked no questions. They declared: “We will do and we will listen” (*Sifrei Deuteronomy* 343). As the order of the verbs indicates, the people declared that they would fulfill the prescriptions of the Law even before they knew what they were. Having left their encampment at Rephidim, where they had complained to Moses about the lack of water, they stood at the foot of Mount Sinai. Here they promised their ungrudging obedience without any hint of complaint.

As free beings, we are not forced to follow any particular way of life. The Vatican II document, *Gaudium et Spes*, states: “For its part, authentic freedom is an exceptional sign of the divine image within man. For God has willed that man be left ‘in the hand of his own counsel’ so that he can seek his Creator spontaneously, and come freely to utter and blissful perfection through loyalty to him” (17). So, too, Saint Benedict invites us to live a life of faith and good works. It is up to us to accept or refuse his invitation. Benedict asks in the Prologue to his Rule: “What can be sweeter to us, dear ones, than this voice of the Lord inviting us? Behold, in His loving kindness the Lord shows us the way of life.” In Chapter 58 on the reception of new members, the Rule is read to the novices three times: after two months, six months, and four months. The newcomer is told: “Here is the law under which you wish to fight. If you can observe it, enter; if you cannot, you are free to depart.”

Having accepted Benedict’s invitation, we then promise our obedience. Monastic obedience is not simply external conformity. Inner assent is called for, and the motive of inner assent is love.

Obedience requires that we lay down our own wills, and that we show respect and concern for those with whom we live. Obedience also entails a healthy sense of humility: thinking neither less nor more of ourselves than who we are, and putting the needs of others before our own.

Loving obedience is shown by our readiness of response and cheerful generosity. There is nothing more corrosive in community or family life than constant complaining. Of course, there are always some legitimate complaints, which must be dealt with appropriately. We must always keep in mind the words of Chapter 72, on good zeal: “No one is to pursue what they judge better for himself, but instead, what they judge better for someone else.”

A suggestion:

The sisters of Sacred Heart Monastery, Yankton, South Dakota, have an online oblate chapter that some of you may find helpful, especially if you are unable to attend oblate meetings. The online chapter enables any oblate or inquirer to communicate with other oblates from around the world. You do not need to change your monastery affiliation in order to participate—please do not! The link is <http://yanktonbenedictines.org/oblates/online-chapter>. From there just follow the directions at the bottom of the page.

Now the news:

Sr. Hope Rodenborn, director of our Tucson oblates, Jessie Zanders, one of our Tucson oblates, and I attended a conference of the North American Association of Benedictine Oblate Directors (NAABOD) from July 10-15, at Subiaco Abbey in Arkansas. The theme was *Nurturing Benedictine Spirituality: From Theory to Practice*. The presentations were excellent and hopefully we can share them with you in one way or another.

All oblates should be receiving our bi-monthly magazine, *Spirit&Life*, which is complimentary (that means free) for all our oblates and friends. Let me know if you are not receiving it, or if you have family members or friends who would enjoy it.

Clyde oblates mark your calendars for the next weekend. September 25-27, 2015. This weekend is open to all oblates. The topic will be *Hearing God's Voice*. Further information will be forthcoming.

Saint Louis area oblates next meet on August 15, 2015. 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). The group is reading and discussing *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB.

Sand Springs oblates are not meeting during the summer months. The next meeting is October 4, 2015, and I hope to be there. The group has chosen *In the Heart of the Temple: My Spiritual Vision for Today's World* by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB, as the next book to read and discuss.

Sheridan, Wyoming, oblates are also not meeting during the summer. Meetings pick up again in September. The group is reading and discussing Sr. Maria-Thomas Beii's *Study Guide for The Rule of St. Benedict with Reflections for Oblates and All Who Seek God*.

Peace,

Sr. Sarah