



## *The Benedictine Oblate Letter*

*June, 2016*

Dear Oblates and Friends,

Many passages in Scripture speak of respect for the elderly. The elders teach the young the wisdom that can only be gained by experience: “Remember the days of old, consider the years of generations past. Ask your father, he will inform you, your elders, they will tell you” (Dt 32:37). Without such wisdom, there is no guidance, and we are set adrift in a sea of ignorance. The Book of Proverbs tells us that the old should be respected: “Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is gained by a life that is just” (Prv 16:31). Those who live just and holy lives continue to bear fruit in old age, as is beautifully expressed in Psalm 92:13-16.

The just shall flourish like the palm tree,  
shall grow like a cedar of Lebanon.  
Planted in the house of the Lord,  
they shall flourish in the courts of our God.  
They shall bear fruit even in old age,  
they will stay fresh and green,  
To proclaim: “The Lord is just;  
my rock, in whom there is no wrong.

It may be normal for the young to disregard the advice of those who are older. In the rebellious 1960s, when I was in high school and thought I knew everything, the slogan was “Don’t trust anybody over thirty.” The necessity of inter-generational reconciliation is evident. Such reconciliation is, indeed, one of the characteristics of the final judgement and the end of time. The prophet Malachi, at the conclusion of his book, says: “Now I am sending to you Elijah the prophet, Before the day of the Lord comes, the great and terrible day; he will turn the heart of fathers to their sons, and the heart of sons to their fathers” (Mal 3:23-24). The New Testament continues to teach in this vein. Saint Paul speaks of relationships across generations in 1 Timothy 5:1-2: “Do not rebuke an older man, but appeal to him as a father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters with complete purity.”

Saint Benedict recognizes that the young may have something to say that should be heard. In Chapter Three of his Rule, “On Calling to Brethren for Counsel, Saint Benedict says, “The reason we have said that all should be called for counsel is that the Lord often reveals to the younger what is best.” In Chapter 63, “On the Order of the Community,” Benedict states: “And in no place whatever should age decide the order or be prejudicial to it; for Samuel and Daniel as mere boys judged priests.”

Still, Saint Benedict teaches us to honor our seniors for their understanding, knowledge, and experience, which are often lacking in the young. When a recalcitrant monk is excommunicated, the abbot is to send *senpectae*, “brethren of mature years and wisdom,” to console the wavering brother and induce him to make satisfaction for his fault (Chapter 27). Some positions of responsibility must be held older members. Chapter 66 requires that the porter or portress should be one of the mature seniors: “At the gate of the monastery let there be placed a wise old woman, who knows how to receive and to give a message, and whose maturity will prevent her from straying about.”

Saint Benedict instructs his monks: “Wherever the brethren meet one another the junior shall ask the senior for his blessing. When a senior passes by, a junior shall rise and give him a place to sit, nor shall the junior presume to sit with him unless his senior bid him, that it may be as was written, ‘In honor anticipating one another.’” I would probably faint if someone gave his or her seat to me, so shocked would I be. I do not consider myself quite old enough for that yet, but I also know that I will never be shown that degree of respect.

In modern times the elderly have too often been thrust aside, neglected, dismissed, and disdained. They have lost their voice, and society has lost the ears with which to hear their wisdom. Our world has changed, and manners with it. Nevertheless, any society, community, or institution that does not listen to its wise and experienced members has no solid foundation and no future.

***And now the news:***

***The International Congress of Benedictine Oblates*** will meet Nov. 4-10, 2017, in Rome. The theme is *A Way Forward: the Benedictine Community in Movement*. More information will be forthcoming. If anyone is interested, please let me know.

***Reading List:*** Last month I sent out a *Recommended Reading List for Benedictine Oblates*. I have received very few suggestions for additions to this list. Please think about it and let me know.

***Clyde oblates:*** The next meeting is scheduled for September 17-19, 2016, on the theme *Blessings: What, Why, Where, When, and How*. All are welcome!

***Saint Louis area oblates:*** 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).

***Sand Springs oblates:*** The next meeting will be on September 11. The group is up to Chapter 7, “Empowerment,” in Sr. Joan Chittister’s book *In the Heart of the Temple*.

***Sheridan, Wyoming, oblates*** meet the first Saturday of the month. There will be a potluck on July 11, when two candidates will make their final oblation. Then the group is off until September.

***Tucson oblates:*** The next regular meeting will be on Sunday, September 18, 2016. The *lectio divina* program is continuing this summer every Saturday from 10 to 11 am. There will be an ice cream social on July 17 from 1:00-2:30 to celebrate the Feast of Saint Benedict.

Peace,

***Sr. Sarah***