



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

March, 2014

Dear Oblates and Friends,

We celebrate two feasts of St. Benedict. March 21 commemorates the *Transitus* of St. Benedict. The Latin word means “passing,” that is, death. Most saint’s days are observed on the date of that saint’s death. Since the 1969 calendar reform, the universal Church celebrates the feast of St. Benedict on July 11, because March 21 usually falls during Lent. Each Benedictine community chooses one of these days as a solemnity and the other as a feast. So that our celebration would not be impeded by Lent, we chose July 11 as the solemnity; Conception Abbey chose March 21 as the solemnity because then their students are still in school and most of the monks are home.

St. Gregory gives this account of St. Benedict’s death in Chapter 37 of Book II of his *Dialogues*:

Six days before he died, he gave orders for his tomb to be opened. Almost immediately he was seized with a violent fever that rapidly wasted his remaining energy. Each day his condition grew worse until finally, on the sixth day, he had his disciples carry him into the chapel where he received the Body and Blood of our Lord to gain strength for his approaching end. Then, supporting his weakened body on the arms of his brethren, he stood with his hands raised to heaven and, as he prayed, breathed his last.

Because of his holy death, Benedictines have regarded St. Benedict as the patron saint of a happy death. Years ago we used to recite a prayer for a happy death that reads in part:

O Holy Father, St. Benedict, blessed by God both in grace and in name, who while rapt in prayer, with your hands raised to heaven, did most happily yield your angelic spirit into the hands of your Creator...protect me, I beseech you, O glorious father, this day and every day by your holy blessing, that I may never be separated from our dear Lord.

A shorter prayer that is said when wearing the medal of St. Benedict asks: “Protect me in all dangers of soul and body, and obtain for me a happy hour of death.”

I never thought much about death when I was younger, but as the years go I do more so more frequently. I have become more aware of death with experiences of personal losses, and I have kept vigil by the bedside of sisters in their last hours. In Chapter Four of his Rule, on the

instruments of good works, St. Benedict tells us “to keep death daily before our eyes.” One might find this very depressing. In his next two instruments, St. Benedict gives us two reasons keep death in mind: first, so that we might keep constant guard over our actions, and, secondly, that we might “know for certain that God sees one everywhere.” Keeping death daily before our eyes is an impetus to avoid sin, to do justice, and to live in love.

St. Benedict says the same thing regarding the first degree of humility, in Chapter Seven: “Let a man consider that God is always looking at him from heaven, that his actions are everywhere visible to the divine eyes and are constantly being reported to God by the angels.” Thus to be mindful of death is related to humility: the awareness of God presence, God’s greatness and my own vulnerability and weakness, my reliance on God’s grace and mercy. Our last sister to die was 105 years old, but none of us know how old or in what condition we will be when God calls us home. But we believe that God will embrace us with infinite compassion and mercy.

And now the news:

The next Clyde meeting scheduled for May 2-4. Mark your calendars! A mailing will go out soon.

An invitation is extended to all oblates to attend the 7th Annual Monastic Institute, July 17-20, at Sophia Center, the spirituality center of Mount St. Scholastica Monastery, Atchison, KS. The speaker is Kathleen Norris. Space is limited and registrations will be taken as they come in. For information contact Sr. Mary Elizabeth Schweiger, OSB, at maryliz@mountosb.org or phone her at 913-426-7355.

St. Louis area oblates are meeting monthly. Meetings are held on the third Saturday of the month at the St. Rose Philippine Duchesne parish office. Anyone in the St. Louis area is welcome to attend.

Peace,

Sr. Sarah, O.S.B.