



*The Benedictine Oblate Letter*

*March, 2015*

Dear Oblates and Friends,

As you probably know, on March 21, we celebrate the *Transitus* of Saint Benedict. This means his “passing,” or his death. That is normally the day when we celebrate the saints’ days; that is, the day they pass from this life to eternal life. On July 11, we celebrate another feast of Saint Benedict. This is the day that the universal Church celebrates the Feast of Saint Benedict, primarily because March 21 usually comes during Lent. Benedictines have been given permission to celebrate one of these days as a solemnity and the other as a feast. Our Congregation celebrates the solemnity in July in a big way, and observes March 21 more simply.

Not wanting to repeat an earlier letter, I googled the Feast of Saint Benedict, March 21. I found out something new, which I never heard of in my over forty years of monastic life. Here it is:

Saint Benedict is one of the patron saints of beekeepers. There is a legend that bees on March 21 Saint Benedict summoned the bees to search for nectar (<http://www.lonestarfarms.net/archives.php?type=cletus&id=16>). To this day, some beekeepers attach a medal of St. Benedict to their hives. That is a good idea these days when bees are so threatened.

Google also gives Saints Valentine, Ambrose, Abigail, and Gobnait as the patron of beekeepers. Saint Gobnait? Apparently she is also known as Abigail, a Hebrew name that means “father rejoiced” or “father’s joy.” She is also known as Deborah, a name that means “bee.” Gobnait was an Irish saint of the fifth or sixth century. She worked with her brother, Saint Abban, to found a monastery over which she was abbess. She was known for her care of the sick, and apparently used honey for healing purposes. The legends concerning her are very interesting, but would take us off on a long tangent.

There are, however, good reasons that Saint Benedict is a patron of beekeepers. Early Benedictine monasteries were usually self-sufficient. Early monks had to provide for all needs. One thing that would be included in every monastery was beekeeping, to make beeswax for candles, and honey for food and mead (<http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/liturgicalyear/prayers/view.cfm?id=483>). Even today monks earn their own living, and some keep bees.

Self-support, and the manual labor it involves, are important Benedictine values. In Chapter 4 of the Rule, in which Benedict lists the tools of the spiritual craft, Benedict describes the monastery as a “workshop.” He concludes his list of seventy-four tools with this: “Now the workshop in which we shall

diligently execute all these tasks is the enclosure of the monastery and stability in the community.” Here Benedict changes metaphors: in the Prologue, he describes the monastery as a “school for the service of the Lord.” He must have realized that we never graduate from this school, and so we must go straight to work.

Work, when it is balanced with prayer and leisure, should be enjoyed, as honey is enjoyed. Bees keep busy making honey, and honey, because it is sweet, symbolizes delight. When the Lord guided the people of Israel to the Promised Land—a land “overflowing with milk and honey” (Ex 3:8 and elsewhere)—he is said to have “suckled them with honey from the crags” (Dt 32:13). Psalm 81:16 uses the same image: “Israel I will feed with the finest wheat, I will satisfy them with honey from the rock.”

The same applies to all of life. Life is meant to be enjoyed; it should not be entirely dull and dreary. Saint Benedict said in the Prologue: “For as we advance in the religious life and in faith, our hearts expand and we run the way of God's commandments with unspeakable sweetness of love.” This also applies to our journey through Lent to Easter. We should “look forward to holy Easter with joy and spiritual longing” (RB 49).

***And now the news:***

***Clyde oblates*** mark your calendars! The next weekend will be June 5-7, 2015. June 7 is Corpus Christi, so it is a marvelous time to be at Clyde.

***Sand Springs oblates*** continue to meet monthly. Sister Pascaline was present for the last meeting. Despite snowy roads and travel warnings, seventeen oblates attended. Gale Clark was received as a candidate, and Cynthia Patterson was received as a transferee from another Benedictine community. The group chose *In the Heart of the Temple: My Spiritual Vision for Today's World* by Sister Joan Chittister, OSB, as the next book to read and discuss.

***Sheridan, Wyoming, oblates*** also meet monthly from September to May under the able leadership of one of their members, Cel Hope. 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*.

***St. Louis area oblates*** are meeting monthly. Meetings are held on the third Saturday of the month from 1:30 p.m. - 3:00 at St. Rose Philippine Duchesne School. Meetings are held in Room 1, which is accessible from Door 1 at the east end of the school.

Peace,

*Sr. Sarah, O.S.B.*