



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

March, 2016

Dear Oblates and Friends,

I like Lent. It's always been for us a time of greater silence and discipline, nothing too hard. But I've always thought it should be more like Advent and last only four weeks. Lent is much too long. I also like the fifty days of the Easter season. We look forward to Easter, with its joyous liturgies and festive meals. Still, after countless alleluias, innumerable processions, endless liturgies, and limitless culinary indulgence, sometimes Ordinary Time comes as a blessed relief. After all, celebrating takes a lot of energy. Really, my favorite season is Ordinary Time. I like normalcy best of all. I've waited for many years for things to be normal.

Saint Benedict, when he was living as a hermit in a cave at Subiaco, didn't know when it was Easter. Usually he ate only the bread that the monk Romanus lowered down to him on a rope. But on Easter day, God provided him with a feast. Apparently the feast was more than bread and even included meat. Saint Gregory the Great tells us the story in the first chapter in Book Two of his *Dialogues* (<http://www.osb.org/gen/greg/>).

At length when almighty God was determined to have Benedict's life for an example known to the world, that such a candle, set on a candlestick, might shine and give light to the Church of God, our Lord vouchsafed to appear to a certain priest dwelling a good way off, who had made ready his dinner for Easter day.

He spoke thus to him: "You have provided good cheer for yourself, and my servant in such a place is afflicted with hunger." Hearing this, the priest rose up, and on Easter day itself, with such meat as he had prepared, went to the place, where he sought for the man of God among the steep hills, the low valleys, and hollow pits, and at length found him in his cave. After they had

prayed together, and sitting down had given God thanks, and had much spiritual talk, then the priest said to him: “Rise up, brother, and let us dine, because today is the feast of Easter.”

The man of God answered, and said: “I know that it is Easter with me and a great feast, having found so much favor at God’s hands as this day to enjoy your company” (for by reason of his long absence from men, he knew not that it was the great solemnity of Easter). But the reverend priest again assured him, saying: “Verily, today is the feast of our Lord’s resurrection, and therefore it is not right that you should keep abstinence. Besides I am sent for that reason, that we might eat together of such provision as God’s goodness has sent us.” Whereupon they said grace, and fell to their meat, and after they had dined, and bestowed some time in talking, the Priest returned to his church.

I think there are a few lessons that we can learn from this story. Benedict, austere as he was, did not abstain from food on Easter. He enjoyed the meal and, even more, the company of the priest who brought it. He expressed his gratitude. The exercise of hospitality was very important to him even when he was a hermit. He obviously did not maintain his solitude and silence on Easter. He had to celebrate the Lord’s resurrection. We should do the same for all fifty days.

And now the news:

Clyde oblates mark your calendars! The Clyde meeting is scheduled for May 13-15. All are welcome; it’s not Mother’s Day, which is on May 8. The theme is *Still Point of the Turning World*. It will focus on silence and mindfulness, and will include a presentation by Sr. Colleen Maura on the use of technology.

The Clyde oblates enjoyed their March meeting. It began with an Israeli movie on the theme of hospitality. *Ushpizin* (an Aramaic word meaning “guests”). It’s a light-hearted comedy that asks serious questions: how does one deal with unexpected, troublesome guests? Is the experience a test of faith? How does God hear and answer prayer? The whole movie is available on You Tube; just search for the title. It’s in Hebrew with English subtitles.

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). The group has been discussing *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century* by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB. They are also doing *lectio divina* as a group, following *Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* by Luke Dysinger, O.S.B.

Sand Springs oblates: The Sand Springs oblates meet on the first Sunday of the month. The group is reading *In the Heart of the Temple* by Sr. Joan Chittister, OSB. I will be giving a mini-retreat at the Forest of Peace on April 9 on the theme *Burning Hearts*; it's on the importance of the Eucharist and Scripture in our lives. All are welcome. I will also be present for the meeting on April 10.

Sheridan, Wyoming, oblates meet the first Saturday of the month. 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*.

Tucson oblates: there are four oblate groups affiliated with our Tucson monastery: Prescott, East Valley, Phoenix Central, and Tucson. The East Valley group is engaged in a study of mercy, geared toward the Jubilee Year of Mercy. The other groups are discussing Pope Francis' encyclical on ecology, *Laudato Si'*, in the light of the Rule. The Prescott group is also discussing Michael Casey's book, *The Road to Eternal Life*, and are up to Chapter 20. For information about the Tucson oblate groups, you can read their newsletter at <http://www.benedictineoblates.com/resources.php>.

Wishing you all a very happy and blessed Easter,

Sr. Sarah