



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

May-June, 2013

Dear Oblates and Friends,

Jesus told his disciples: “I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world” (John 6:51). The disciples quarreled over what Jesus said. But Jesus did not “dumb down” his message because of their density. Instead he taught them further: “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink” (John 6:53-55).

The disciples still did not understand. They refused to accept his teaching: “Since Jesus knew that his disciples were murmuring about this, he said to them, ‘Does this shock you? What if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.’” Jesus distinguishes here between the natural and supernatural. In John 3:6, Jesus says: “What is born of flesh is flesh and what is born of spirit is spirit.”

John’s Gospel may reflect something of Greek thought. The Greeks separated the physical from the spiritual. In contrast, biblical spirituality sees the physical and spiritual as interrelated. The psalmist sings: “You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother’s womb. I praise you, because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works! My very self you know” (Ps. 139:13-14). In Jewish practice, there is even what might be called a bathroom prayer, which thanks God for the marvels of the human body.

Blessed are You, Lord, Our God, King of the universe, Who created the human with wisdom and created within him many openings and many cavities, exposed and known before Your Throne of Glory, that if one of them were to be ruptured or one of them were

to be blocked it would be impossible to survive and to stand before You for even one hour. Blessed are You, Lord, the healer of all flesh who acts wondrously.

The ancient text of this blessing is found in the Talmud (*Berakot* 60b), which also teaches that angels accompany us when we perform certain bodily functions.

Benedictine spirituality is biblical. St. Benedict provides for the needs of nature when he outlines the liturgical norms. We find in Chapter 8: “From Easter to the aforesaid Calends of November, the hour of rising should be so arranged that the Morning Office, which is to be said at daybreak, will follow the Night Office after a very short interval, during which they may go out for the necessities of nature.” Benedict legislates for the amount of food and drink (Chapters 39. 40). He assures that clothing will fit the individual: “The Abbot shall see to the size of the garments, that they be not too short for those who wear them, but of the proper fit” (Chapter 55). The twelfth degree of humility is manifest in bodily posture of the monk: “The twelfth degree of humility is that a monk not only have humility in his heart but also by his very appearance make it always manifest to those who see him. That is to say that whether he is at the Work of God, in the oratory, in the monastery, in the garden, on the road, in the fields or anywhere else, and whether sitting, walking or standing, he should always have his head bowed and his eyes toward the ground.”

This discussion about spirit and life is to let you know that, while I am continuing as oblate director and am remaining at Clyde, I have been named editor of our magazine, *Spirit & Life*. I will succeed Sr. Lenora in this work once I know what I am doing. Help *Spirit & Life* continue to live and thrive. If you do not already subscribe, please do so by letting me know or by going to our website. *Spirit & Life* is under the tab “News Center.” Here’s the link:

<http://www.benedictinesisters.org/spirit-and-life-magazine-home.php>.

Also let your friends and families know about it. It is bi-monthly and free. Do promote it in whatever way you can.

I am going to Tucson for part of June and all of July for training under Sr. Lenora. In August I am taking some time to be with my family. Consequently, the next letter you will receive from me will be in September, when I will resume monthly letters.

Here are some reminders: I have been posting short video clips on the oblate website on various aspects of Benedictine spirituality and prayer. Go to www.benedictinesisters.org, click on oblates, and the videos are under “resources.”

All oblates are welcome to the 2013 fall retreat to be held Oct. 18-20. Mark your calendars. More information will be forthcoming.

St. Louis area oblates, who have been meeting every third Saturday of the month at the St. Rose Philippine Duchesne parish office, are now off for the summer months. I am hoping to hold a day of recollection for this group in September. The precise date and time will be announced.

May you all have a safe, relaxing summer!

In Christ,

Sr. Sarah, O.S.B.