



The Benedictine Oblate Letter

May, 2018

Dear Oblates and Friends,

When the Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus said farewell to its fans earlier this year, I mourned its passing. The circus was very much a part of my childhood; my grandmother took us to it every year when it came to New York. Watching the high wire and trapeze artists, we'd ask her, "Grandma, can you do that?" She would say, "Sure I can!" She could fly on the trapeze and balance on the high wire. She could tame lions and elephants. She could do anything. My grandmother was a wise woman and a keeper of stories. We loved and respected her.

Many cultures have traditions of respect for elders. In Native American cultures, for example, elders are valued as protectors, mentors, teachers, and transmitters of cultural knowledge. Not all older people are considered elders. An elder is a person that has accumulated a great deal of wisdom and knowledge throughout his or her lifetime, especially in the traditions of the group. Elders emphasize listening and not asking why. The Cree language does not even have any word for "why." A learner must sit quietly and patiently while the elder passes on his wisdom.

As for myself, I can't imagine not asking questions. Where I come from, every question is answered with another question. There is never any agreement on the answers. Debate is the preferred method of instruction. The Rule of Saint Benedict, however, is not in accord with these customs.

Like the Book of Proverbs, the Rule is composed as a series of instructions to a single disciple. It begins with a quotation from Proverbs 4:20: "Listen carefully, my child, to your master's precepts, and incline the ear of your heart. As such, it does not encourage questioning the master and it certainly does not promote debate. In Chapter 5 on silence, Benedict says:

For speaking and teaching belong to the mistress; the disciple's part is to be silent and to listen. And for that reason if anything has to be asked of the Superior, it should be asked with all the humility and submission inspired by reverence.

Similarly, in Chapter 2, "On Calling the Brethren to Counsel," Benedict states:

Let the brethren give their advice with all the deference required by humility, and not presume stubbornly to defend their opinions; but let the decision rather depend on the Abbot's judgment, and all submit to whatever he shall decide for their welfare. However, just as it is proper for the disciples to obey their master, so also it is his function to dispose all things with prudence and justice.

The Rule falls under the category of wisdom literature. Wisdom is experiential knowledge that comes from living and not just studying. Wisdom literature balances opposing values. For example, "A stitch in time saves nine" is balanced by "Haste makes waste." The wise know both sayings, as well as which one applies to the present situation. This is the reason that discretion and discernment are key Benedictine values.

Discretion is the ability to make responsible decisions. A discrete person knows what to do in a particular situation. Prudence, closely related, is the ability to govern oneself by the use of reason. It requires good judgement and some degree of shrewdness. Thus, in Chapter 64, "On Constituting an Abbess," Benedict says:

In her commands let her be prudent and considerate; and whether the work which she enjoins concerns God or the world, let her be discreet and moderate, bearing in mind the discretion of holy Jacob, who said, "If I cause my flocks to be overdriven, they will all die in one day." Taking this, then, and other examples of discretion, the mother of virtues, let her so temper all things that the strong may have something to strive after, and the weak may not fall back in dismay.

Let us heed the words of Scripture:

I, Wisdom, dwell with prudence,
and useful knowledge I have.

Mine are counsel and advice;

Mine is strength; I am understanding. (Proverbs 8:12,14)

And now the news:

Clyde Oblates

The spring weekend is scheduled for June 1-3. The theme is "Praying with Rule of Saint Benedict." Corpus Christi is on June 3, and this will be a wonderful weekend for oblates to come to Clyde. All are welcome!

Tucson Oblates

The Tucson oblates meet on the third Sunday of the month. The deans meet monthly on the Saturday following the regular meeting. If you have any questions for the deans, please email tucsonoblates@gmail.com or call 520-664-5136. The group is now on summer recess until September.

Phoenix Central: The Phoenix group meets in the St. John Paul II room at the Mount Claret Retreat Center, 4633 N. 54th Street. The oblates are using the *Study Guide to the Rule of Benedict* by Maria-Thomas Beil, OSB. For information call Patty Williams 602-957-1464.

West Phoenix: The West Phoenix group meets in Glendale for a morning of prayer, community, and fellowship on the third Saturday of the month from 9:00 am -12pm. The group is reading *Lessons from Saint Benedict*, a collection of letters written by Donald Raila, OSB, of Saint Vincent Archabbey. For information call Lisa Hughes at 623-374-2382. At present the group is on summer recess.

East Valley: The East Valley Oblates meet on the fourth Saturday of the month. The next meeting is on Saturday, February 24. For information call Nancy Kaib 480-883-8025 or Frank Young 480-219-1505.

Sand Springs:

The oblates meet on the first Sunday of the month at 11:30 am in the Bede Building. Visitors are always welcome. The group is reading and discussing *The Divine Dance* by Richard Rohr.

Sheridan, Wyoming:

The group meets on the first Saturday of the month. They are enjoying lively discussions of the *Study Guide for the Rule of St. Benedict* and are also reading *Radical Grace* by Sister Joan Chittister. For information, contact Cel Hope at celhaus@fiberpipe.net; you can also email me at sarah@bspa.us or phone me at 660-944-2221.

Peace,

Sr. Sarah