



Benedictine Oblates of Nebraska

Associated with Sacred Heart Monastery

DECEMBER 2005

ASSIGNMENTS

Lincoln Chapter

Sun., Dec. 11, 2005 7-9 p.m. North Commons
Mon., Dec 12, 2005, 7-9 p.m. Flanagan Room
Presentation by Oblates Carol Olson and Marti Fritzen on their trip to the World Congress.

Hastings Chapter, St. Michael's Church, Family Room
Sat., December 10, 2005 9:30 a.m. - 11:30 a.m.
Presentation by Oblate Marti Fritzen on her trip to the World Congress.

Steinauer Chapter, Banquet Hall, across from St. Anthony's Church
Monday, December 5, 2005, 6:15 p.m. Pot luck
Presentation by Oblate Marti Fritzen on her trip to the World Congress.

Omaha Chapter, All Saints Episcopal Church, 9302 Blondo
Tuesday, December 13, 2005, 7-9 p.m.
Presentation by Oblates Carol Olson and Marti Fritzen on their trip to the World Congress.

OBLATION SUNDAY: CONGRATULATIONS to all our new Oblates and Oblate Novices. For those of you who were not able to be present, I will be contacting you about when we might do a mini Oblation with you. The Oblate Novices should receive a leaflet along with their Benedictine medal. For those of you who did not, we will have them available at the December Chapter meeting.

ADVENT- COME LORD JESUS: Bittersweet! It is the time, once again, to be simple, to focus on a young pregnant Jewish maiden who is nurturing with her flesh and blood the fetus within. It is a time of silence, waiting, growth, expectation. For her, a time of quiet joy, of wonder. She lives in the moment; trusting.

As we reflect on this calm, pure young woman, we are aware of the larger circumstances surrounding her pregnancy: the miraculous conception (who will believe?); a child out of wedlock, while betrothed. From

a worldly person's perspective-bittersweet; but not from hers. all is calm, all is peaceful, all is delight.

Jesus Christ grows in her, nurtured by her, dependent for his very life upon her. God is in charge. He has chosen wisely. Now, it is the time for nature to do its part.

Waiting! Waiting for the bursting forth of a little baby into our cynical, sophisticated world! Is the birth of the baby – of a baby – bittersweet in our world? Or is it sheer joy and expectation? (Our Family News, St. Bede Abbey)

OBLATE NOTES, ETC:

- Please continue to pray for Oblate Martha Hunzeker who is continuing to have chemotherapy.
- CONGRATULATIONS to Oblate Dan Deffenbaugh of Hastings. He has received the Nebraska Professor of the Year Award. It is presented each year, nationwide, by the Carnegie Endowment for the Advancement of Teaching. Each state may nominate. Thirty-eight were presented this year.
- Two Oblates, Deb Miller and Philip Ross submitted this announcement: Sisters: Portrait of a Benedictine Community, www.pbs.org/independentlens/sisters. The Sisters of the St. Scholastica Monastery in Duluth, Minnesota, pursue a balanced life based on the Rule of St. Benedict and face an uncertain future with spirit, conviction and wit. Told by the Sisters themselves—at work, prayer and leisure—SISTERS follows their lives over a span of two years. The one-hour program will air as part of the series "Independent Lens" on Tuesday, Dec. 20, at 10 p.m. CT on NET1 (Channel 12 in Lincoln). It should air at the same approximate time on PBS stations nationwide unless the local station chooses not to follow the national schedule.
- St. Joseph Abbey, Spencer, MA, reports the death of Father M. Basil Pennington, OCSO (Cistercians/Benedictines) on June 3, 2005, subsequent to a car accident in April. Father Basil was a prolific and popular writer on spiritual topics and introduced many to the daily practice of Lectio Divina.

- The Friends of St. Benedict in Washington, DC will have a pilgrimage in Italy led by Esther de Waal. Pilgrims from U.S. and England will meet July 7, 2006 at a hotel in Turin. Highlights will be Assisi, Nursia, Subiaco, Monte Cassino and Rome. Contacts: 202-363-8061 or saintbenedict@prospect_tech.com. Website: <http://www.benedictfriend.com>.

THE BIBLE AND BENEDICTINE SPIRITUALITY:

One of the things that even a casual reader of the Rule of St. Benedict notices is the numerous references to the Bible scattered throughout all 73 chapters of this small document. Some of these references are actual quotes, while others are paraphrases of, or allusions to, biblical texts. The standard Latin-English edition of the Rule of St. Benedict (RB1980) lists 132 references to the Old Testament and 189 references to the New Testament. This alone gives strong evidence of the central importance the Bible has for Benedict's Rule.

Some have observed that those who follow the Rule of St Benedict should not be called "Benedictines." A more accurate title would be: "People of the Bible." Regardless of what the followers are called, the Rule is biblical in its inspiration, in its demands, and in the opportunities it offers. Prayer, work, relationships, the role of the abbot, and the reception of guests are all understood from the perspective of a biblical context.

The foundation upon which all Benedictine spirituality is built is prayer, both communal and private. Communal prayer is focused on the Divine Office, which, in turn, is rooted in the Psalms. The Psalms, of course, have long been known as Israel's prayer book. They express almost every emotion known to humankind. They are poetry, so they rely heavily on metaphor, rhythm, imagery and word play. This is the kind of language that captures the experiences that constitute what we call "spirituality."

Those who pray the Psalms daily in common begin to notice that an interesting pattern begins to develop. At first, one concentrates on each word and each sentence, trying to grasp the content and message of the psalmist. Eventually, this approach subsides as a certain "rhythm of the office" takes over. Many sentences of the Psalms get embedded in the memory. The rhythms and metaphors become more important than individual words. Finally, one begins to realize that prayer has

ceased being merely the recitation of the word of each Psalm. One's whole presence is now the prayer. It is expressed in a certain interesting rhythm that patterns itself on the metaphors and imagery that each Psalm evokes. Since the hours of the Divine Office are spread throughout the morning, daytime and evening, one's entire day evolves around the patterned presence of prayer.

The individual prayer traditionally encouraged by Benedictine spirituality is *lectio divina*. This is simply the slow meditative reading of sacred scripture. It is not a type of biblical study or exegesis. It is actually a form of intensified listening to God through the vehicle of the Word of God. There is no guarantee that God will speak. But there is a guarantee that, if God happens to do so, the reader is attentive and listening. There is no other goal for *lectio divina*.

It is not an overstatement to say that Benedictine spirituality is nothing more than a form of biblical spirituality. The Rule of St Benedict itself is understood as merely an extension and application of the Bible. The Divine Office is almost totally taken from the Bible. And *lectio divina* is also centered on the meditative reading of the Bible. This does not mean that Benedictine spirituality allows for nothing outside of the Bible. That is not true. What it does mean, however, is that all Benedictine spirituality that is authentically Benedictine will be firmly rooted in the Bible, which for all Benedictines is the living Word of God. (Benedictine Oblate, Fr. Eugene Hensell, OSB, St. Meinrad Archabbey)

