



Benedictine Oblates of Nebraska

Associated with Sacred Heart Monastery

February 2008

ASSIGNMENTS ARE THE SAME FOR ALL CHAPTERS:

Wisdom from the Tradition,

Chapter V, pp. 45-57; RB 3; 1 John 4

- **Lincoln Chapter:** Sunday, North Commons Cafeteria or Monday in the Sheridan Rooms A & B. NOTE ROOM CHANGE FOR MONDAY, Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital. Sunday, Feb 10, 2008 and Monday, Feb 11, 2008:
- **Steinauer Chapter:** Banquet Room, across from St. Anthony's Church, Monday, Feb 4, 2008, 7-9p.m.
- **Hastings Chapter:** St. Michael's Church, Family Room, 9:30 – 11:30 a.m. Saturday, Feb 9, 2007
- **Omaha Chapter:** New Cassel Retirement Center , Lecture Hall, 900 N 90th Street, East Entrance, Omaha , NE Tuesday, February 12, 2008

RETREAT FOR OBLATES: There are a few more openings for the Feb. retreat. If you are planning to go, do contact Sr. Joelle Bauer at jbauer@mtmc.edu, 605-668-6009. If you would like to share a ride, contact Sister Phyllis (see end of newsletter) who will also be going.

PLEASE NOTE: The Monday Chapter meetings will now be in the Sheridan Rooms A & B at Madonna Rehabilitation Hospital. These are two of the same rooms that we use on Sunday nights.

INFORMATION ABOUT JANE JOHNSON: In visiting with Ken and asking him how we might be of help, he said that it would be helpful if there would be someone who could be with Jane at times when he has to be gone from the house. If that is something that you would like to do, please send me your name, telephone number and the time of day you might do this, for instance, morning, afternoon or evening. Then I will compile a list for Ken that he has available. Let us continue to keep them in our prayers. Blessings! Sister Phyllis

SNOW POLICY:

1. Should we have 4-5 inches of snow, we will cancel the meeting without notice. The meeting will not be

rescheduled. The next months meeting will occur as scheduled with that month's assignment.

2. Should we have a snowstorm which will be hard to judge, an email will be sent. For those without email: In Lincoln: please call the switch board at Madonna 489-7102 or call someone with email. In Omaha, Steinauer and Hastings: Please call someone with email.

OBLATE INITIALS: A number of you have asked if you can use Oblate after your name. When you have made your final Oblation, you may use Obl. OSB after your name.

THE OBSERVANCE OF LENT READ RB 49:

St. Benedict does not have a chapter on Advent or on any other liturgical season. Chapter 49 is written regarding Lenten practice and preparation for Holy Easter. It is a little jewel, taking material that could be negative and brutal and casting it in the most positive, generous and theologically sound manner.

One way to hear Benedict's admonitions is as an invitation to self-emptying. Nature abhors a vacuum. If you plow a field and don't tend to it on a regular basis, it will not be long before all kinds of things are growing. It is amazing how many weed seeds are in the ground, just waiting for a chance to sprout.

We certainly know how difficult it is to keep spaces open on our desk, or in our rooms. By analogy our lives fill up, take on clutter. A monastic Lent is about emptying our cups, so that there is room for the Word of God, space for the Holy Spirit to work. Lent is about taking stock of time and how we use it, how we fill it. Our tradition is very clear about the priority of God's grace working in us. In Deuteronomy God reminds Israel that it is chosen not because it is the brainiest, the brawniest, or the largest of nations (Deut. 7:7-8). God choose Israel out of sheer love and out of fidelity to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Benedict writes in verses six and seven: "In that way each one, of his own free will with the joy of the Holy Spirit, can offer God something beyond what is supposed on him...and let him await Holy Easter with the joy of spiritual desire.

The joy Benedict describes depends on the work of the Holy Spirit. We are preparing a space for the work of the Holy Spirit who is present in each one of us as a consequence of our baptism. We are joyful because we already experience what we wait for. (Ash Wed. Con., St. John's Abbey)

“A DAY AT ST. ANDREW’S ABBEY, VALYERMO CA” by Oblate Elizabeth Rodacker
Last week (Sunday, November 18th), I drove with 3 other Oblate members to SAINT ANDREW'S ABBEY, in VALYERMO (<http://www.valyermo.com/>). As we drove the 2+ hours through the desert, my mind reflected on the purpose of an abbey in the dessert. Many questions ran through my head: Why would the Benedictine monks build an abbey in the dessert? How can people find this dry earth beautiful? What is the hidden gift I am seeking while at Saint Andrews today? Will God show me His face today?

Many motifs ran through my consciousness including Christ's time in the desert, the writings of the desert fathers and mothers, and my own desert spiritual experiences. I am in a type of desert time now, as I have left Lincoln where my husband, dog, and I lived for nearly a decade. In leaving Lincoln we left our home, neighborhood, friends, church, jobs, and the wide open spaces of the Midwest that offer clean air and symbolize openness, honesty, and treasured connections.

Driving up to the abbey was a bit shocking. Many places in California are excessively large and crowded, and the abbey grounds, paradoxically, were quite small and empty. Surrounding the abbey is what on first glance I shrugged off as "nothing"; Additionally, I knew it to be full of monks instead of nuns, a disappointment in my mind. Further reflection has led me to appreciate the "nothingness" as a respite from the frantic California pace and busy lifestyle with crowds and congestion commonplace. I am still grappling with the monks vs. nuns' factor.

The abbey bookstore is literally built in levels and parts are underground. The passages and mazes continued to amaze me, it offers a section of gifts and books from other traditions, including Judaism. The shelves were stuffed with books by Chesterton, Thomas Merton and others. I purchased a wall plaque from Ecuador with St. Francis surrounded by animals and the beginning of his prayer, "Lord, make me an instrument of your peace."

One highlight of the day was church at 12 noon. We gathered in the chapel about 11:40, as it gets very crowded, leaving time for meditation and prayers. The

monks walk in a procession to the front of the chapel donned with long, white, flowing robes. They sing/chant throughout the service. One monk (a former physician) plays beautiful harp music and also offered a brief sermon on how the disciples urged Jesus to tell them exactly when the world will end. In the sermon, we were reminded--as we so often are with the teachings of Christ--that humans are usually asking the wrong questions. Instead of worrying about the end of the age, love others and trust in God. So simple, yet not easy! I found the message quite beautiful in these times.

After lunch, I walked around the grounds with Anne, a new Oblate friend. We circled the small lake, enjoying the perfect weather when a very large bird, perhaps a crane, flew directly in front of us, almost with an arm's reach! It quickly touched the water and then gracefully flew off. Anne and I immediately knew it to be a special gift for just the two of us from God. Such beauty, such directness, such boldness! I found one hidden gift; God showed me His face!

Once a month is Oblate Sunday, so Oblates from various cities joined mass and the post-lunch, highly academic presentation by a professor from St. John's University in Southern California. The professor asks all Oblates to reflect on the traditions that are offered to us as Oblates (vows, pins, medals, renewal of vows and more) and meditate on the deeper meanings, share our journeys with others, and critically think about the purposes.

A trip to St. Andrews would not be complete before visiting the ceramics shop. <http://www.standrewsabbeyceramics.com/> A ceramic angel for every purpose and vocation can be found in the shop, including a yoga angel, a Buddhist angel, a tennis player's angel and many more. Ceramic saints fill the shelves and other items.

The drive home was long, but I had received blessings, heard beautiful harp music, met new friends and was reminded of the beautiful, direct, and bold communication from God. Thank you, God for loving me!

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