



Benedictine Oblates of Nebraska

Associated with Sacred Heart Monastery

December 2006

ASSIGNMENTS

LINCOLN CHAPTER:

Sunday, December 10, 2006 AND Monday, December 11, 2006:

Text: Strangers to the City by Michael Casey, Chapter 1, Distinctiveness

Also read: RB Prologue 45-50, RB 66, 67 & 69; Mark 9:2-9

STEINAUER CHAPTER:

Banquet Room, across from St. Anthony's Church
Monday, Dec. 4, 2006, 7-9 p.m.

Text: Strangers to the City by Michael Casey, Chapter 1, Distinctiveness. Also read: RB Prologue 45-50, RB 66, 67 & 69; Mark 9: 2-9

HASTINGS CHAPTER:

St. Michael's Church, Family Room, 9:30 – 11:30 a.m.
Saturday, December 9, 2006:

Text: Path of Life, Chapter 2, Stability, pg. 15-26
Also read: RB Prologue 22-50

OMAHA CHAPTER:

All Saints Episcopal Church, 9302 Blondo, Omaha NE
68134, Rite 13, Classroom.

Tuesday, December 12, 2006, General Assembly:
Text: Path of Life, Chapter 2, Stability, pg. 15-26
Also read: RB Prologue 22-50

RENEWAL OF OBLATION: Attached you will find the Renewal of Oblation Certificate for you to sign and return. You may do that by email if you wish – by typing in your name. I will print it out when I receive - it for your file. For those without email, please sign and return to me by postal mail. I especially love hearing from those of you at a distance. Let us know what is happening in your world and I will share it with the others in the next newsletter. Sister Phyllis

WELCOME: ADVENT! With the beginning of the season of Advent, we begin a new liturgical year. The First Sunday of Advent (Nov. 27) is therefore the Church's "New Year's Day". In the Judeo-Christian tradition, Sunday begins at sundown of the day before when the faithful celebrate First Vespers. Advent begins the Christmas cycle.

Advent comes from the Latin word for an "arrival" or a "coming". Advent means that the Lord is coming. Jesus Christ, our brother in our humanity and our God in His divinity is about to arrive. But He comes to us in different ways. First, Jesus came to us at a specific point in history at Bethlehem about 2000 years ago. But in the Church's great feast of Christmas He mystically comes again. Second, the Lord, Alpha and Omega, will come to judge the living and the dead in the Second Coming. Third, the Redeemer comes to us in grace. He speaks to us in our consciences; he comes to us in the Eucharist and in the Word of God proclaimed. He arrives in the person of the beggar, the needy, the suffering, the oppressed. We must be ready to receive and welcome Him when He comes, however He comes.

A JOYOUS AND MERRY CHRISTMAS!



“Christ is born. He is born to us. And, He is born this day. For Christmas is not merely a day like every other day. It is a day made holy and special by a sacred mystery. It is not merely another

day in the weary round of time. This day eternity enters into time, and time, sanctified, is caught up into eternity. This day, Christ, the eternal word of the Father, who was in the beginning with the Father, in whom all things were made, by whom all things consist, enters into the world which he create in order to reclaim souls who had forgotten their identity. Therefore, we exult, as the angels come down to announce not merely an old thing which appeared long ago, but a new thing which happens this day. For God the Father makes all things

new, in his divine Son, our redeemer, according to his words: ecce nova facio omnia.” (Thomas Merton)

Having read the above notes on Advent and Christmas, I pray that each of you will be entering into this holy liturgical season with all your hearts and minds. St. Benedict gives us 12 chapters of the Rule (RB 8-19) about the Liturgy. The Liturgy of the Hours holds a prominent role for him in our daily lives. It is especially invigorating for us during these special days. You will all be remembered in my Advent and Christmas prayers. Sister Phyllis



“WE ARE ALL ARTISTS! IN THE JOY OF BEAUTY AROUND US!”

By Sister Cynthia Binder, OSB. Sacred Heart Monastery: Throughout my childhood and even up to the time I left home, our family had a Christmas Eve tradition that never changed. Like many others, we exchanged gifts... Santa was very sneaky leaving gifts in a corner in the kitchen or in the trunk of the family car...it took me a long time to figure out how he managed that. But for us the most important part of that evening was coming to the monastery for midnight mass. We never missed that. This was followed by a delicious repast at Grandma Ann Brown Binder’s house. There was no rule about when we got to bed that night. We sensed that the feast was so important that all rules fell away and we just celebrated. The part of that night which stands out in my mind is something I can still see and hear very clearly: the wonder and awe of midnight mass. I see our old chapel, gone now for 50 years, the dimmed lights, the Christmas decorations, and especially hearing the beauty of the chant, the music.

Why this nostalgic story? It came to me as I was reflecting. I cannot remember when the realization first came to me that my own spirituality was strongly connected to the arts. I have a sense too that for all of you the nourishment from the arts has been a consistent and profound wellspring in your own spiritual formation. I refer not just to the formal arts: painting, sculpture, literary works, architecture, music, dance, and from the 1800’s photography and film, but I refer to that broader world also where creative people, all of you, those with green thumbs, those who play musical instruments, those who compose music or do writing, who create beautiful things for us to look at, cherish, and use. Here in our monastery space we are surrounded by beauty of all kinds. We have beauty at our disposal...A more formalist definition of this says that art exists more for beauty or spiritual significance than for physical utility.

The personal responses we spontaneously give to the beauty of art were indirectly nourished for us in our early years here by what we found in the Holy Rule in the very first chapters. Here we are reminded by Benedict to do precisely what the arts and the artists demand of us (whether we are a creator or an observer): look within, cherish silence and reverent reflection, respect the process where heart and mind slowly build and create a spiritual intensity within the monastic person, put heart and intellectual energy consistently into daily meditation. One is especially moved by RB 7’s insistence that we abandon the false self, that we go outside of ourselves and turn to others who may need us or who may show us a new path. This chapter also asks us to cherish at all times the sense of awe with which we should turn to God.

Even Benedict’s admonition in the chapter on the abbot gives the reminder that we shouldn’t give too much attention to the transient affairs of this world...artists deal with the meaning and the intent of life. They interpret life for us. They tap the deepest reaches of our spirit. They point to what is beyond. They articulate those things which are of primary consequence to us. The arts provide a common cultural language. They help us sort out what is important and what is secondary. They deepen and affirm our values; they help create a culture of peace, they make us part of a global community. Above all, artists help create a clearer reflection of God in the world. Artists create beauty as a reminder that we, as Benedict says, will return to Christ. The earthly beauty is a reminder of what is to come.

My wish for all of us is to allow the beauty around us to wash over us and to ever deepen that journey to God. We are all artists, some of us more observers than actual creators...but we become creators when we respond to that beauty. As we look around at the beauty we have and feel the sensitivity that Benedict readied for us in those early chapters of the Rule, be mindful of all that artist put before us: their contact with life, their focus on the goodness of created life, their concern for humanity and a shared fate, with others, exposure to the human condition in all its diversity, and the fundamental question about using our existence meaningfully. Our response to all that means that we are reaffirming our humanity and developing our fundamental goodness. At the end of the Holy Rule, Benedict says: “This is the good spirit that frees us and brings us closer to God and to eternal life.”

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