



"Nothing Dearer Than Christ"

Oblate letter of the Pluscarden Benedictines

Elgin, Moray, Scotland IV30 8UA

MB Series No 3 -July 2009

"Let nothing be preferred to the Work of God" (HR 43:3).

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Elgin, Moray, IV30 8UA , Scotland .U.K.

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Monastic Voices

MAGNUS AURELIUS CASSIODORUS SENATOR, as he was called in his own day, was born at Scylliacum, in what is now Calabria, c. 477. His family had held very high positions in the State, and he himself, when only twenty years of age, was named private secretary to King Theodoric, who placed entire confidence in him. In 514, he was appointed consul, and for three successive terms served as prefect of the pretorium. Unlike Boethius, Cassiodorus was favored by fortune even under the successors of Theodoric; but he deliberately turned his back on the world. In 540 he retired to the monastery of Vivarium (Viviers), which he had founded on his estates in Calabria and, after donning the monastic habit(disputed by historians), devoted himself completely to the study of ecclesiastical science and to the reforms with which he purposed to insure its diffusion. He died, c. 570, at the age of ninety-three. Although Cassiodorus found light from above in the entire Bible, nevertheless the psalter, the prophets, and the epistles meant the most to him, and at the same time they represented the deepest abysses and the summit of the whole Scripture. He felt beginners in the study of Holy Scriptures should first take up the fourth codex (written manuscript with separate pages bound together as a book) and so become familiar with the psalter. The monk should first fill himself with the reading of Holy Scripture, then apply himself to the commentators (such as himself!).

"COMMENTARY ON PSALM 94

"...So the marvellous economy of

the psalm ensured first that the prophet encouraged the people with friendly enticements, and then the Lord Himself warned the most obdurate of them to soften their stony hearts by pondering the majesty of their Lord. Explanation of the Psalm:-Come, let us exult before the Lord. let us show jubilation before God our saviour. Like a judge's herald, the Church's cock which arouses the people invites those who pray to wake from the sleep of this world and sings praises to the Lord with happy exultation. Come is said to those who he feels are stationed afar off, who have not yet attached themselves with purity of faith. Though we never withdraw ourselves from the Lord since He is wholly everywhere, we none the less become distant when we are displaced through the nature of our deeds...One can truly presume with joy on Him...when exultation elicits instruction rather than destruction. Next follows: Let us show jubilation before God our saviour. We have often said that jubilation is a great feeling of joy which cannot be put into words, but is uttered at the top of one's voice; it reveals the inner joy which language cannot express...

2. Let us anticipate his appearance with confession, and show jubilation to him with psalms. Anticipation means performing some action before a person thought to be approaching can be sighted...

3. For the Lord is a great God, and a great king above all gods. For the next three verses reasons are given why we must show jubilation before the Lord... Truly indeed is He called King, for He both creates and rules all things.

4. For the Lord does not reject His people. For in his hand are all the ends of the earth: and the heights of the mountains are his. After speaking of the Lord's greatness, he passes to His wonderful and boundless clemency. He says that the Lord does not reject the Jewish people which he is known to have chosen for himself...He added: And the heights of the mountains are his. The heights of the mountains are earthly honours and worldly

powers, which he says belong to the Lord so that we may not be dislocated through being puffed up by them. Though the sea runs high through fierce winds, it has the shore as its boundary; in the same way though worldly powers are not circumspect in boasting of their strength, they accept a limitation on their sway.

5. For the sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry. The sea denotes the nations, which are disturbed in this world by various blasts of vices. He says that they were made by the Lord so that you may realise that all things are subject to His will. Everyone who performs some actions has those acts under His control; as another psalm has it: All the nations thou hast made shall come and adore before thee, O Lord.

6 Next comes: And his hands formed the dry. Earlier he spoke of the sea and here of the dry, which is reasonably interpreted as the earth, for it is always intrinsically dry unless watered by river-floods or showers. In the same way our hearts are barren and dry, failing to bear good crops unless they are watered by the Lord's mercy and unless He deigns to steady our vacillating and tottering persons with the gift of His mercy. So, as was said earlier, we must append to all these verses: Let us show jubilation to him... Come, let us adore and fall down before him: let us weep before the Lord that made us. At the beginning of the psalm he invites the people to show jubilation; now he urges them to seek the safety of repentance-and rightly, because earlier the people he invited to exult were novices, and he did not seek to impose on them a possible source of fear when they were still apprehensive. But after the glory and power of the Lord has been recounted, he appropriately imposed tearful confession, for the spirit when instructed could not reject that most wholesome medicine... It is a gesture of great confidence to weep before Him who deigned in His devotion to fashion us. He speedily recognises His workmanship if He sees our hearts turned to Him. So weeping before the Lord means pouring out devoted tears and condemning our most wicked deeds, so that we may deserve to obtain forgiveness for the things which we abandon from fear of the Lord. If we pray with total purity of heart, He who made us will readily restore us. In this way the picture of persons praying is described by the figure called *characterismos*.

7. For he is the Lord our God; and we are his people and the sheep of his pasture, if today you shall hear his voice. A threefold reason is given why The Lord is to be adored First, because He is the Lord our God, so that the duty of adoration seems rightly to be offered Him. Secondly, because we are His people. And next comes: And the sheep of his pasture; this is the third clearly bestowed promise. The status of the people is again being defined; they are the sheep of the Lord's pasture. Pasture denotes the heavenly gifts on which the soul grows fat with sweet feasting. The definition of the Christian people as the sheep of the pasture is excellent, for they have the blessed lot of being filled with eternal delights. Sheep signifies simplicity of heart, a clear attribute of the people in harmony with their shepherd through their gentle devotion. But a single condition is imposed on all this, if today you shall hear his voice, that is, hear the words which He is to speak next. The flock which does not hear the shepherd's voice is not called his, and is not set in the pasture; as we read in the gospel: My sheep hear my voice and they follow me; and I know them, and no man plucks them out of my hand; and the rest. Today signifies always, for He who offers saving advice must be listened to continually. The apostle powerfully expressed the force of these words: But exhort one another every day, while it is called 'Today'. Up to now the prophet has spoken; now let us examine what follows:

8. Harden not your hearts as in bitterness, according to the day of temptation in the wilderness. We have reached the second beginning, in which the Lord Saviour addresses the Jews to prevent their imitating the obstinacy of their parents and thus becoming exiled from the Lord's rest... They proved me, and saw my works. They tested Him especially when manna rained on them in their hunger, when a crowd of quails was bestowed on them, when a flood of water flowed out of dry rocks. As for the addition: And saw my works, here their infidelity is being rebuked, for they beheld with physical eyes what they refused to believe with the heart's gaze. So He said: They saw, not "They believed."

10. For forty years I was close to this generation, and I said. They always err in heart, and they have not known my ways. This length of time is found to have been stated to indicate a great mystery. Whereas the Lord fasted for forty days to achieve this mystical number, and He completed forty days with the apostles after the resurrection so that the whole world might believe...

11...

12...swore to them in my wrath: they shall not enter my rest. God is said to swear in two ways. He swears in a peaceful and gentle way, as we read in another psalm: Once have I sworn about my holy one: to David I will not lie.

13 But here He is said to swear in anger, because we find Him threatening vengeance. Clearly, however, this oath is relevant to the strength of the promise. If men swear to abide by their promises, how much more is God said to swear, so that what has been foretold may come to pass with the requisite consistency!...What then does the Lord swear? That the obdurate will not enter into His rest, but instead eternal death will embrace those who have not deserved to attain the blessings of making satisfaction to Him. It is right that they cannot enter into rest, for they offend Christ Himself who is the Gate to peacefulness. We must however investigate what His

words they shall not enter into my rest mean. The teacher of the Gentiles explains the passage in this way, with the words: And God rested the seventh day from all his works.' So the person who has entered into His rest obtains rest also from his own works, as God did from His. He is pointing to the blessed time when the just, after the struggle of this world, enjoy eternal rest. This will be withheld from the unholy who have grown hard in their wickedness... If you ask for water in the desert, assemble at the Lord's font. If you long for manna, receive the body of the Lord Saviour. Those earlier gifts brought punishment to your fathers, but these bring eternal rest to you. You can do more. Overcome your predecessors in faith, spurn their unbelieving hearts. Listen, and with God's enlightenment believe what your forbears refused to accept when they beheld it, for their will was blinded. Do not dissemble, while there is still time. If you refuse to acknowledge God's warning now, you will later have to endure His judgment." ...

FROM THE OBLATE MASTER'S DESK..... 'THE "INVITATORY" PSALM 94 OF THE DIVINE OFFICE' — (MARITIME & PASTORAL TALES!!)....

a story:- Our tale begins in Tomintoul with its claim to be the highest village in Scotland (disputed with Leadhills?), an old Catholic parish in the mountains only a few miles from Scaln, the little seminary on the moors where priests were secretly trained after the '45. Here one finds St. Michael's centre, for over thirty years now, a Catholic Centre for outdoor pursuits & the passing on of the faith to youth & others.

A former bishop of the diocese of Aberdeen adjured a young & very green parish priest to take his Confirmation class there for a week's outdoor recreation & inward spiritual formation, which he did. The week ended, it being by then Saturday, the eve of the Lord's day, the lull before a whirl of liturgical activity & travel, the young priest had rested his mountain-weary limbs that day & it was nine o'clock before he was launched into the invitatory, psalm 94 of the Divine Office, the daily "preface" to Morning prayer.

Being then back in his own presbytery in the Viking-named, East-coast hub of his wee parish ('wee' by numbers of souls, but stretching from coast to coast) he had just got as far as the words in psalm 94, "the heights of the mountains are His..", when the 'phone rang. Feeling a bit guilty about so tardily reaching this milepost by nine in the morning he rather unprayerfully said, "Drat!", or words to that effect.

At this point it should be added that the parish had as a project the conversion of a bakery into a Catholic church in a West-coast fishing village which at that point was simply a Mass station. This had run up a large debt for which an appeal had gone out for help. "Klondykers" (freezing fish) from Russia and fishermen from Killybeggs & of many nations came there in the season. An Irish sea-Captain John Oglesby* by name, from Killybeggs would come there with his three vessels for up to 2 months at a time & every man of his crews would pack the pews of the Church on Sunday.

He was approached in a hostelry late of a Saturday night by a prominent parishioner who suggested that since fishing was good that year he might think of donating the value of some fish to go towards the new church. The Captain agreed to the value of a ton of fish.

The parishioner duly told the young priest after Mass there of a Sunday who duly made a mental note. Months passed. Surely one of those ardent promises made with generous enthusiasm late at night.

Where were we?...Oh yes. Back in that East-coast parish presbytery, base to the young priest who, returning from a week's mountain gallivanting in Tomintoul with his Confirmation class was just belatedly getting in psalm 94 to the words, "the heights of the mountains are His," when the phone rang.

Is that the parish priest that looks after the bakery being turned into a Church on the West-coast of Scotland?" "Yes"

"This is a lawyer speaking from Killybeggs, Ireland representing a Mrs. Oglesby here, who wants the dying wishes of her husband carried out to the letter. Her husband was the late Captain John Oglesby and he died in an onboard accident as they were sailing homewards. His dying wish was that the value of a ton of fish from his catch be given to the new church. That will come to about £1,100. Is that alright?"

The priest stammered that it was and gave his profound thanks and after exchanging postal details they put down their 'phones.

Then the bemused & mountain-wearied priest tried to turn his distracted thoughts back to his Morning Prayer of the Divine Office---- "Where was I?—Oh, yes 'The heights of the mountains are His' & then flabbergasted his startled eyes fell upon the next words..

"To Him belongs the sea for He made it!"

The story is true & no names* have been changed, may the Captain rest in peace & the Lord bless his wife! I tell this true story to commend the saying, the praying of the Divine Office to all of you.

One aspirant recently described the Divine Office as a "hotchpotch"!(on his first sight of it I should add! I hope he will forgive me for quoting him anonymously) Two thousand years of the Church's distilled prayer is very far from being a hotchpotch & as I hope my story illustrates it is more accurately a hot-line to the mind of Christ, of God, of the Church.

In touch with the Divine Office, especially the two "hinges", Morning & Evening prayer of the Church, you

are in immediate touch with the whole of reality—the mountains & sea, past ,present & eternity, the stars & all of suffering & rejoicing humanity.

The Divine Office sustains the note of the Day's Eucharist & sounds a chord that resounds throughout the day. The Divine Office is a lens with which to see reality as it is.

The Divine Office is the one contemplative activity that is not carried out to the detriment of others because your hand is in the hand of He Whose other hand is on the tiller.

As a toddler, to my great delight, my late Father would sometimes let me hold his leg , like a pillar, with both of my feet standing firmly on one of his as he strode along at great speed as if with “ ten-league boots”!

So it is when we pray the Prayer of the Church. Grasping onto God nothing is lost & everything is gained!

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Some of you may have read this article By Fr. RONALD Rolheiser, the Roman Catholic priest and member of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate & so well known to us from his columns. He is president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. For all of us, revision or not, this article is a timely reminder for we Oblates. Grateful thanks for his kind permission to use it. Please remember his work in your prayers.

Visit his website, www.ronrolheiser.com

“PRAYER is classically deemed as lifting mind and heart to God. That's a good definition, but it needs an important qualification. There are two essential kinds of prayer: Liturgical prayer, the public prayer of the Church, and private or devotional prayer. Unfortunately we often confuse the two. For example, 500 people might be sitting in meditation together in a church or praying the Rosary together at a shrine and this is still private or devotional prayer. Conversely, someone might be praying the Office of the Church alone at home in an armchair or a priest might be celebrating the Eucharist alone at a kitchen table and this is public, liturgical prayer.

The distinction is not dependent upon the number of people participating, or whether the prayer is taking place in a church, or even whether the prayer is being prayed in a group or privately. The distinction is based upon something else. What? Liturgical, public prayer might more aptly be called priestly prayer, while private and devotional prayer might better be termed affective prayer. Priestly prayer is the prayer of Christ through the Church for the world. Our Christian belief is that Christ is still gathering us together around His word and is still offering an eternal act of love for the world. As an extension of that we believe that whenever we meet together, in a church or elsewhere, to gather around the scriptures or to celebrate the Eucharist we are entering into that prayer and sacrifice of Christ. This is liturgical prayer; it's Christ's prayer, not ours. We pray liturgically whenever we gather to celebrate the " scriptures, the sacraments, or when we pray, in community or privately, something that is called the Prayer of the Church or the Office of the Church (e.g. Lauds and Vespers - Morning & Evening Prayer). This kind of prayer is not restricted to the ordained clergy. We are all priests by virtue of our baptism and part of the implicit covenant we make with the community at our baptism is the commitment when we reach adulthood, to pray habitually for the world through the liturgical prayer of the Church. The Church's liturgical prayer is for the world, not for itself. The Church does not exist for its own sake, but as an instrument of salvation for the world. Its function is to save the world, not itself. In liturgical prayer we pray with Christ, through the Church, but for the world. Affective prayer has a different intent. Though it has many forms, meditation, centering prayer, praying the rosary, devotional prayers of all kinds, it has a single aim, to draw us and our loved ones into deeper intimacy with Christ. All non-liturgical prayer ultimately aims at personal intimacy with God and is private even when it is done publicly or in a large group. All private and devotional prayer can be defined in this way: It is prayer that tries to open us up in such a way that we can hear God say to us: 'I love you!' It is important to know this distinction.

When we go to pray, to confuse the two is to risk doing both badly. For example, the person who feels frustrated because the liturgical ritual and interaction of a congregation inside a Church service are felt as a hindrance and distraction to the private devotional prayers they would like to say is confusing the two forms of prayer and is consequently doing both badly. The function of liturgical prayer is not first of all devotional. Sometimes the confusion leads someone to abandon one form of liturgical prayer altogether. I know a man who after years of praying the Office of the Church is substituting his own private prayer in its place because he doesn't find the ritual prayers personally meaningful. His private meditations now might well be wonderful affective prayer, but he is no longer praying the priestly prayer of Christ when he is praying in this way. We see this sometimes too in well-intentioned, but badly planned, Church services where what is intended to be a liturgical service ends up being a guided private meditation, however well-done and powerful, which neither uses scripture nor prays for the world.

Churches themselves struggle with this. Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Episcopalians, and Protestant churches have a strong liturgical tradition, sometimes to the detriment of affective prayer. --Evangelical and Pentecostal

churches, on the other hand, have a strong focus on affective prayer, sometimes to the point of neglecting almost entirely liturgical prayer.

We would probably all do ourselves a favor by having two prayer shawls, each : embroidered separately: priestly prayer and affective prayer.”

-By Fr Ron Rolheiser –

Our grateful thanks and acknowledgement at the head of this article, above.

Books & Media:- For our Postulants & Novices (& all of us bar the monks in the monastery) I recommend for the Divine Office, the main subject of this Oblate Letter, “Morning & Evening prayer”, published by Collins price £30 or starting £17 second hand & get at home with that for a year or two before you ice the cake.

“Dinnae get a new-fangl’d Latin ane” first off or the other parts of the Divine Office—all of which can be purchased as separate books (e.g. “Night Prayer”, “Prayer During the Day”, “The Office of Readings”).

None of these is the bread & butter or haggis of being an Oblate. Morning & Evening Prayer are " the two hinges of the day"! Without these your Oblate Life’s door is hanging off. Which isn’t to say that through illness or extraordinary activity these might not be possible. For such times you can use a more basic form like “A Shorter Morning & Evening Prayer”(Collins £10 new) or “A Time of Prayer”(CTS £1.95) { handy for pocket & handbag along with your rosary}. When staying at the monastery ask the Warden or Guest Master for Office Books if you want to follow it more closely or use the booklets or pages handed out or in the racks. An Oblate is not a poor woman’s/man’s monk but flesh in its own right & not fish or red herring!!(so to speak)

Cistercians as you know, also, like us, try to follow the Rule of St Benedict so for other books this quarter why not follow a Cistercian strand:-E.G. “ Stephen Harding”—‘A Biographical Sketch & Texts’ by Claudio Stercal trans. By Martha F. Krieg ISBN 978-0-87907-326-8 (pbk) Cistercian Publications Kalamazoo, Michigan US \$18.95 or equivalent. He is a more “bread & butter” Cistercian than St Bernard of Clairveaux! Or a book to dip into as appropriate going back to our common pre-Benedictine roots, “‘Becoming Fire’-Through The Year With The Desert Fathers & Mothers” Ed. By Tim Vivian, Cistercian Publications, Liturgical Press, Collegeville, Minnesota. US \$39.95 or equivalent. ISBN 978-0-87907-525-5 (pbk)—both of these see www.litpress.org Websites--- As well as www.benedictine-oblates.net which we have already recommended <http://www.universalis.com/today.htm> gives the whole Divine Office (!) of the day. If travelling you could print off the day’s office on a few sheets! The Calendar set for Scotland—

<http://www.universalis.com/today.htm> That is all free. You can download the whole Divine Office at this site to have permanently on disk or stick for £15 approx. (& save £70?—for occasional use! Not bread & butter! (Thank you Beth!

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Prayers & News:- We share the joy of the Ordination to the priesthood of Fr. Dunstan Robertson by Bishop Peter Moran on the 20th August 2009. We entrust him especially to your prayers. We also especially entrust to your prayers Fr Camillus Warner—long-time guestmaster & PKER monk so well-known to, & beloved by, us all, who died fortified by the rites of Holy Mother Church aged 85 the memoria of St Aidan & the Lindisfarne Saints, 31st August. His Funeral Mass & burial at our monastery were on the Saturday following when indeed the heavens had wept copiously as almost never before. So copious had the rain been that it prevented our bus getting to St Peter’s Buckie the day before where it was arranged we sing Vespers for our distinguished Oblate Mgr Robert MacDonald celebrating his 80th birthday & the parish-priest of St Peter’s celebrating his 40th birthday, Fr. Gerry Livingstone. Br Michael de Klerk our Cellarer is celebrating his silver jubilee of Solemn Profession. Ad Multos Annos. Fr Bede Kierney (monk of her at St. Mary’s Petersham USA) has suffered a double bereavement of his Mother & Sister—for all of whom please pray. Thankyou , though for your prayers for our three-day Liturgical Music Symposium which went very well & , please God , will be published in some form(s) in the near future (see report in PB) . Please pray for our own Mgr. Richard Moth, oblate of Pluscarden, being consecrated/ordained Bishop of the Forces on the 29th of September 2009 at Westminster Cathedral, London, 11.00am. (Please pray especially, too for Mrs. Margaret Coll who therefore will be our sole delegate to the Oct. Rome Congress & is giving us a report—she is not 100% health-wise). Ian (Aidan) Brodie & Frederick (Francis) Brodie both made their Oblation in June after years of preparation starting as novice-oblates of Fort Augustus Abbey RIP which is therefore still bearing spiritual fruits for which we thank God. Please pray for a health intention there, too. Also Jim (John Ogilvie) Bradley made his Oblation in June. Please pray for his happy & fruitful retirement. Kathleen Reddy & Ann McAllister have become novices. New Postulants include Phil Hammond, , Henry Logan & Rev Alsadair Nicholl (Air force--special prayers, please & for his family). Sick Oblates, novices or postulants & their families for whom we pray include: John Cairns, Beth Fraser, Phyllis Spalding, Beth Fallows, Peter Aitken, Helen Grant, Norah Napiontek, Kassia wife of Marcin, Tom Devine, Mary Buist & many, many others whose illness is part of our Benedictine, spiritual offering & Oblation.

Forthcoming Events. Items For Your Diary. Turvey Abbey. Weekend for Oblates of any Benedictine Community 23-25th Oct 2009 on Lectio Divina

Oblate Weekend 2010 (next year that is here) Friday 30th July to Monday 2nd of August. Please book –as thirteen of you, women & men, have already—with Br. Gabriel or Br Thomas as appropriate. Do, please let me know too wherever you intend staying. Watch this space!!

Sundry Item(s):- Did you know? There is a Glasgow group of Oblates who meet (in Glasgow) from time to time. Contact Mr. Peter Aitken (Brother of our own Br Mungo RIP), 11Maxwell Grove, Glasgow, G41 5JP Ph 0141 427 2084 There is a Dundee group of Oblates who meet from time to time. Contact: Mr. Tom Devine. 30, Strathearn Court, Kirkton Place, Forfar DD8 2DX .There is a Dunfermline group who meet from time to time. Contact Mr. Patrick Carrigan.

Whether postulant, novice, Oblate or simply a fellow-pilgrim on the way, this comes to you with prayer & a blessing.

Yours in Christ & SPNB,

Fr. Martin, Oblate Master

RENEWAL OF OBLATION OR INTENTION TO MAKE FINAL OBLATION

Oblates normally renew their promises on or about 21 November, the feast of the Presentation of Our Lady. Please indicate your desire to continue living according to the spirit of the Rule of St. Benedict, in union with the monastic family of Pluscarden Abbey, by completing the following and returning it to the Oblate Master, Fr. Martin, Pluscarden Abbey.

"Peace. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I renew my oblation and offer myself to Almighty God through the Blessed Virgin Mary and our Holy Father St. Benedict, as an Oblate of the monastery of Our Lady, St. John the Baptist and St. Andrew at Pluscarden, and I promise, before God and all the Saints, the reformation of my life according to the spirit of the Rule of the same most Holy Father St. Benedict, in so far as my state in life permits."

Or For postulant or novice Oblates

"I desire and intend to make my final oblation, offering myself to God according to the spirit of the Rule of St. Benedict, in union with the monastic community at Pluscarden." (delete as appropriate)

SIGNED:

BLOCK CAPITALS:

WEEKEND FOR OBLATES. BOOKING FORM. PLUSCARDEN ABBEY FRIDAY 30th JULY 2010 COMPLINE TO MONDAY 2ND AUGUST 2010 MASS. Please fill in and return to Fr. Martin, Oblate Master, even if you are already booked into the Abbey Guesthouses, thank you. Please write very legibly. Name & phone no. and/or email and/or postal address :-

Please state where you are staying during the Weekend (if you would like to be in our guesthouse please indicate clearly):-

Already Booked?:- Yes/No ____

Where booked if applicable.....

Parts Attending (Yes/No):- Fri Night* ____; Sat Morn ____ Sat Buff. Lunch ____

Sat Aft ____ Sat Night* ____ Sun Morning ____ Sun Buff Lunch ____ Sun Night* ____ Mon Morn ____

*(There is some special item planned for each part of the above including asterisked, already involving Fr. Abbot, Abbot Anselm, Fr. Giles, Fr. Benedict & the Cellarer, Br. Michael ,.. & others!)