



## "Nothing Dearer Than Christ"

Oblate letter of the Pluscarden Benedictines

Elgin, Moray, Scotland IV30 8UA

DMB series No 10

Easter to Pentecost 2011

## From The Oblatemaster's Desk (Incorporating "Monastic Voices")

In this letter we have moved on from the last, "The Cellarer & Work" skipping temporarily over "Garden Work – the Benedictine and Creation" (perhaps for the season of fruitfulness in the Autumn?) to the theme of "Monastic eating and drinking – meals." (Still following roughly our plan of action from letter one 2009.) That explains our choice of a (possibly) sixth century, monastic text from the "Rule of the Master" as follows:

"When the whole community along with its shepherd has come from the oratory, after the verses and prayer the abbot seats himself in his chair at table. The whole community immediately answers, 'Thanks be to God,' and while all remain standing at their tables the basket hanging over the abbot's table is lowered with the pulley cord, to give the impression that the provisions of God's workmen are coming down from heaven.

As soon as the basket has come down, the abbot makes a sign of the cross over the bread, breaks it, and takes first his own portion, which as he raises his hand will be blessed by the Lord; he sets out the portion for those who are standing before him at his table and who will eat with him, and distributes it to them. Upon receiving it they kiss the abbot's hand and sit down in silence."

The author of the Rule of the Master has variously been labelled eccentric, overbearing, obsessive, insensitive, or some combination of these. "Both the author and the place of origin of the RM are objects of dispute. It has been suggested that the RM may be, in fact, an earlier composition of St. Benedict, perhaps dating from his Subiaco period. Though not impossible chronologically, this view is difficult to reconcile with the profound differences in both form and content between the two rules." ("RB 1980" ,text and commentary p.83)

Perhaps a re-reading of the dialogues of St. Gregory, our only source for the Life of St. Benedict apart from his Rule might suggest a refinement of this latter view. St Gregory's "St. Benedict Life and Miracles" -- "in their resentment they started to reproach themselves for choosing him as abbot.....As he made the sign of the Cross over it with his hand, the pitcher was shattered even though it was well beyond his reach at the time". With this traditional episode in mind can we try this as a quaint & endearing explanation for St. Benedict's use of the Rule of the Master?

The detailed prescriptions of the Rule (of the Master) prove the undoing of the community and of their young Abbot's attempts at being a spiritual shepherd for his flock. From this experience the young St. Benedict learns the discretion & prudence to not "break the vessel" while scraping off the rust.

But in the earlier Rule of the Master what could be more strange and eccentric than to have a basket of bread routinely lowered by a pulley-cord from the ceiling above? Is this only an exercise in random exaggerations? Perhaps there's more to it than that because all these elaborate gesticulations are obviously intended as icons, "miracle plays", drama, visual portrayals of the Word of God. They are meant to be dramatic lectio. They are an attempt to make monastic life a living "theme-park, an exercise in shared & lived salvation memory, anamnesis. This living "thesaurus"/"wordbook" could run e.g. meals, manna in the desert, feeding of the 5000, multiplication of loaves, gathering of twelve basketfuls, the Supper of Eternal Life, the wedding feast of heaven, the Last Supper, the Eucharist.

There you have it! The meal, according to the Rule of the Master, is to be a monastic icon of spiritual refectio. So too, in the Rule of St. Benedict in the life of a secular Oblate, in the varying registers of the prose of life to the poetry of liturgy, God's reality is ever more effectively incarnated in our lives.

A propos, at the start of Advent we shall all be growing accustomed to using a new translation of the Mass.

"While the translation must transmit the perennial treasury of orations by means of language understandable in

the cultural context for which it is intended, it should also be guided by the conviction that liturgical prayer...will facilitate the development of a sacral vernacular”(‘Liturgiam Authenticam’ The Congregation for Divine Worship).

An Anglican friend of mine now gone to his reward once remarked , in terms of the vernacular, it is better by far if the liturgy is a bit above our heads rather than under our feet! For the Mass this must veer towards the side of poetry. Perhaps as we meditate upon our comparisons and contrasts of the differing registers of the Rule of the Master and the Rule of St. Benedict we can more fully appreciate and prepare ourselves to savour and relish the New Translation and get stronger liturgical lungs to breathe the Spirit of the Sacred, that breath of our Father in heaven, who is the Holy Spirit Who dwells in the Son, Whose Mystical Body is the Church.

## **Books and Media**

“YOUCAT” is just out. The Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church. Highly recommendable for all. Well-written & comprehensive in its scope CTS £9.95.ISBN978-1-86082-728-0

Email for information on the New Translation of the Mass and DVD:

contact"AT"becomeonebodyonespiritinchrist.org (replace "AT" with the @ symbol)

Every day, the monthly magazine ‘MAGNIFICAT’ offers:Beautiful prayers for both morning and evening, drawn from the treasures of the Liturgy of the Hours (which Oblates are encouraged to pray). The official texts of the daily Mass, Meditations written by the renowned Fathers of the Church, and a great variety of spiritual writings, Essays on the lives of the saints of today and the past. In each ‘MAGNIFICAT’, you will also find an article giving valuable spiritual insight, into a masterpiece of sacred art.----With the current change in the English translation of the Mass and given the difficulties some find with the DIVINE OFFICE this might be a help for many while looking around for Sunday & Weekday Missals at the present time. It is priced £33.00 per annum.

Pope Benedict XVI’s newest Book “Jesus of Nazareth-Holy Week. From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection!”

Takes all informed Christians & Catholics to a deeper and solid understanding that will feed prayer. CTS £15.00 All the Pope’s books are accessible and edifying whatever our level & wherever we are coming from.

We’ve all read the Rule of St Benedict & we see that St Benedict makes use of The Rule of the Master- CS6 (Cistercian Studies) [Paperback]price £16.27 ISBN 0-879707-806-5

Detailed information on British monasteries, events, and an excellent booklist & much else besides at [www.benedictine-oblates.net](http://www.benedictine-oblates.net)

Prayer Intentions and Events. Pray for the Gathering of Youth in Spain this August. Vocations to the monastery & for our Noviciate. For the Scottish Ordinariate especially Rev Len Black and his fifteen flock of Inverness! We pray for new Oblates Charlie Muir and Dr. Martin Flynn. Also For the repose of the soul of Oblate, Charlie Macdonald, Deacon Bill Joss’s (who himself is recovering from a fall) Wife Margaret and for Mary Buist’s Son Noel. Please pray for all the sick especially Bob Barr’s Sister-in-law & Daughter, for Br. Michael’s Mother, Oblate Sylvia Mary De Klerk, after a fall, Gail Schmitz, Marie Claire Fernandez, Bob Clark, James Cairns and his Sister-in-law, for Irene Coultard, David Paterson & his Wife Beth Fraser, Mary Roche Poppy Sinclair, Zina Neagle and Martin MacRae, Phil Hammond’s Sister, Frances, Eileen Kerr’s Husband Alec, and all the sick, especially those awaiting surgery or treatment or recovering from it. We pray for Maurice and Mary Dufficy who had their Golden Wedding anniversary and for Eugene Fernandez 90 on 31st July. We commend to your prayers our new oblate novices Margaret Graham, Mrs Anne Morgan, and also new oblate postulant Mrs Joan McMurray.

Pentecost Lectures 2011 God, “The Soul and the Spiritual Life.” Professor J. Haldane 14th pm -16th JUNE St. Scholastica’s, Pluscarden.

Art Exhibition at Elgin Public library from Friday 17th June–Friday1st July Opening Reception\*rsvp Fr. Matthew 17th June: 7-9pm Paintings by Fr. Matthew Tylor OSB with Calligraphy by Br Finbar Boyle OSB

## **OBLATE WEEKEND NEXT YEAR JULY 27TH TO JULY 30TH 2012**

please let me know if you intend to come, God willing & book with monastic guesthouses.

## **OBLATE WEEKEND 2013 2nd to 5th August on CALDEY ISLAND**

simply please let me know (name & contact details) that you intend to come. (32 places only—Caldey have minimum charges & there is the travel down to consider)

St Mungo's Chapter Glasgow. As announced. Peter Aitken 11, Maxwell Grove, Glasgow.  
G415JP Phone: 01414272084.

St Margaret's Chapter Dunfermline. Pat Carrigan at smcb\_oblates"AT"live.co.uk or Telephone: 07853 407 913

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3rd of June they had an anniversary Mass

St. Monica's Chapter, Thurso. Contact Jane Coll (website manager Benedictine-oblates) on 01847 851701 or  
jane\_coll"AT"yahoo.com

St. Peter's Chapter Aberdeen. 1st Wednesday's 7.30 aberdeenobls"AT"gmailcom Telephone 01224 485 78119  
Donview House Seaton Crescent, Seaton, Aberdeen, AB24 1TZ.

St Mary's Chapter Dundee. May 21st and dates as agreed 11.30 at St. Mary's High Street, Lochee, Dundee. -----  
--info. St Mary's, or samsiamese"AT"googlemail.com

(Replace "AT" with the @ sign: we are trying to avoid drawing automated spam to these addresses.)

PRAYERFUL BLESSINGS FOR EASTERTIDE AND PENTECOST

Fr Martin pax