



"Nothing Dearer Than Christ"

Oblate letter of the Pluscarden Benedictines

Elgin, Moray, Scotland IV30 8UA

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Monastic Voices

St Gregory the Great on the Gospels Book 2, Extract from Homily 36:

I want to advise you to leave everything but I do not want to be presumptuous. If therefore you are unable to abandon everything which the world offers, you must so hold those things that are of this world that you may not be held by them in the world; that earthly interests may be possessed, not be the possessor, and that what you have should be under the control of your mind. Otherwise, if your mind is bound by the love of earthly things, it may itself rather be possessed by its own possessions.

Therefore let temporal possessions be what you use, eternal things what you desire. Let temporal goods be for use on the way, eternal goods be desired for when you arrive at your goal. Whatever goes on in this world, let it be as it were glanced at from the side. Let the eyes of our minds gaze straight ahead of us, while they are focused intently on the goal to which we shall come.

Let faults be torn up by the roots, torn away not only from the action in deed, but also from the meditation of the heart. See that the pleasures of the flesh, the anxiety of carefulness, the fever of ambition do not hold us back from the great supper of the Lord, but also let us only touch obliquely as it were with our mind those honourable things which we do in the world, so that the earthly things which delight us may so serve our body that they hinder our heart as little as possible.

My brethren, we do not take it upon us to say to you that you should give up everything, but yet, even while holding to all things, you can if you wish, leave them, if you so handle temporal matters as to strive with the whole mind to eternal aims. That man uses the world as if he were not using it, who brings to the service of his life from outside all things necessary, and yet does not allow them to lord it over his mind, so that they are subject to him and serve him from outside, and never break the concentration of his mind as it aims at higher things. Whoever therefore are* like this, have all earthly "things for their use and not as objects of their desires. *subjunctive!

From The Oblate Master's Desk LESS is MORE

What was my surprise to discover when looking again at my list of topics of two years ago that having in the last Oblate Letter the heading: "Cellarer" with sub-heading "Work", I had selected for the next, that is this one, again "Cellarer" with the sub-heading "Property", and why not! Well we had broached "property" in our dealing with "Work" but let us move into another related realm of monastic poverty.

We read in the Rule, Ch. 31, of the Cellarer, "Let him provide for the sick, the children, the guests, and the poor, with all care, knowing that, without doubt, he will have to give an account of all these things on judgment day. Let him regard all the vessels of the monastery and all its substance, as if they were sacred vessels of the altar. Let him neglect nothing and let him not give way to avarice, nor let him be wasteful and a squanderer of the goods of the monastery; but let him do all things in due measure and according to the bidding of his Abbot." Materialism and radical secularism are diametrically opposed to regarding "all the vessels of the monastery and all its substance, as if they were the sacred vessels of the altar". Materialism and secularism precisely lack an altar because everything is mere property including ourselves and the whole world and universe.

In Ch. 55 we read “And if anything should be found with anyone that he did not receive from the Abbot, let him fall under the severest discipline... that this vice of private ownership may be cut off at the root”. The Rule is not here saying that there is no such thing as property but that all is held in common in the monastery. This is a sign, a miniature, a living out in Christian simplicity the fact of our Christian stewardship, that everything is the PROPERTY OF GOD and that any other way of viewing it is quite simply false and a betrayal of God. It is a betrayal of God because it is a denial of everything as Gift (an important word for us!). How could we attempt to live aright without acknowledging that all and everything and life itself is Gift from God and therefore belongs to Him in essence? Our offering it back to Him is making of our hearts one with God in His perpetual giving. Only our hearts can in some sense cease to belong to God by living the lie of self-absorption. Such hearts are rather like feeble, etiolated plants attempting to grow by themselves away from the sun and without a future.

For the monk the place of self-offering is his heart and the altar of the monastery.

For the Oblate the place of self-offering is also his heart and the altar of the monastery, even if like some Oblate-novices they are in Borneo or Brazil! The monastery is the locus of the monk's life both physically and spiritually. The monastery is the locus of the Oblate's life spiritually and only occasionally physically. The spiritual locus is essential to both, for a monk sent on a journey or to found a new monastery and for the Oblate though living in Borneo or Brazil. This spiritual link for each, whether monk or Oblate, is peculiar to their own specific Abbey with its Abbot. Monks of an Abbey and their Oblates share the same Abbot as spiritual Father of that community. Each Benedictine monastery functioning very largely independently and with its unique way of life and liturgy gets its tone set by that Abbot within the Rule and customary and local specific observance and very individual way of life of that spiritual family, unique in the world and that is being Benedictine. It is as a family and it is concrete. Its feet are on a particular bit of ground and not three feet above that ground nor eternally six feet under it!

Benedictines do not always turn to the East to pray, nor towards Jerusalem or Mecca, but their monastery is their Bethlehem, Nazareth, Galilee, Jerusalem, and” new Eden”. It is in the garden that is our monastery, “new Eden”, that like Jack's beanstalks, our beans sprout up to heaven and that spiritually, as for the Oblate so for the monk. Benedictine “spirituality” (a word that is a soul without a body) sprouts up out of the oftime muddy quagmire of the nitty-gritty. The monastic way is “Yes” in my backyard and “Yes” in my front garden & in the house as well “when you lie down and when you rise. (See Dt. 6.4-9).

Property in its most valid understanding is about belonging and as Christians we belong to God in Christ through the Holy Spirit.

Books and Media

I am not given to recommending particular publishers nor do I want to be quoted on a dustcover but at present St Augustine's Press could almost append after their list of titles, “Every One a Winner”!—Get their list and see if it's true. For example, “ The Mass—The Presence of the Sacrifice of the Cross” by the Swiss theologian Charles Cardinal Journet”, translated Fr. Victor Szczurek; nourishing, solid fare. ISBN-13: 978-1-58731-494-0 published English 2008 £23.01, or your library; see www.staugustine.net . Another inter-Oblate website familiar already? Detailed information www.benedictine-oblates.net

Prayer Intentions and Events

We continue to pray for our silver Jubilarians: Br. Finbar, Fr. Benedict and Fr. Mark. We pray for our noviciate & vocations and Br Joseph on his Simple Profession on the Annunciation, 25th March.

For the repose of the souls of Norah Napiontek and Jan de Klerk (our Br. Michael's Father, husband of Sylvia Mary de Klerk), Bob Barr's Wife Ruth and for their families. We commend our new oblate novice, James Shand and also new oblate postulants: Deacon B.A. Burns, Margaret Graham, Brian Docherty, Mrs Anne Morgan and John Joseph McInnes.

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

>OBLATE WEEKEND NEXT YEAR JULY 27TH TO JULY 30TH 2012<

Groups St Mungo's Chapter Glasgow. As announced Peter Aitken 11, Maxwell Grove, Glasgow. G41 5JP
Phone: 0141 4272084

St Margaret's Chapter Dunfermline. smcb_oblates"AT"live.co.uk Pat CarriganTelephone: 07853 407 913

St. Monica's Chapter, Thurso. Contact Jane Coll (website manager Benedictine-oblates) on 01847 851701 or
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St. Peter's Chapter Aberdeen. 1st Wednesday's 7.30 aberdeenobls"AT"gmail.com. Telephone 01224 485 78119

Donview House Seaton Crescent, Seaton, Aberdeen, AB24 1TZ.

St Mary's Chapter Dundee 19th Mar, 16th April, May 21st 11.30. St. Mary's High Street, Lochee, Dundee
samsiamese"AT"googlemail.com

(replace "AT" with the @ symbol: we are trying to avoid drawing automated spam to these addresses)

PRAYERFUL BLESSINGS FOR LENT Fr Martin pax