



Oblates of St. Benedict Belmont Abbey

November, 2013



November Meeting

The next Oblate meeting is on November 17, and will begin at 3:30 in the Gallagher Room. First and Second year Novices will meet at 2:30, also in the Gallagher Room.

Oblate Formation

First Year Novices

Reading assignment for November is Step 1 - Silence in "Finding Sanctuary", and Chapter 6 in the Rule of St Benedict.

Questions to think about: What role did silence play in your childhood? Adolescence? Adulthood?

Does silence make you uncomfortable? With what do you fill the silence?

Pick a task you perform every day (e.g. bathing, cooking, driving). Each time you begin to do it, listen for God. How is God present in the task?

Second Year Novices

Obtain a copy of the Baptismal Service for your faith that you were baptized.

Answer the questions in the Introduction section of *The Benedictine Toolbook*

Be prepared to discuss your experiences with journaling in your life and over the past 30 days.

Oblates

Life Lessons in the Monastery

1. Chapter 5- We Don't Know How to Pray
 - a. Is it our responsibility to pray perfectly?
 - b. What is the only thing that matters in prayer?
 - c. Ultimately who teaches us about prayer?
- 2.
3. Chapter 6- Two Minutes
 - a. How do the two sentences from the Cloud of Unknowing help you to pray?
 - b. How long do we need to pray each day?
 - c. If we make a commitment to pray each day, will your prayer time increase?
 - d. Why does the author say that the most important thing in prayer is to "just be in God's presence"?
- 4.
5. Chapter 7- Vacare Deo
 - a. Explain why the terms "free for God" and "Take a vacation w/ God" are wonderful and so enjoyable to hear.
 - b. How do we learn to relax with God?

6. Chapter 8. Praying the Psalms
 - a. What is the most natural way to pray the psalms?
 - b. Why is the last sentence of the chapter so accurate and insightful as far as praying the psalms is concerned? Is this your experience of the psalms when you sit in the choir stalls, and chant with the monastic community?

Advent is here again



As is so often pointed out we often over look this season approaching because of the secularization of Christmas. Advent has been described as many things, a season of hope, preparation, a reminder of the end times. But how many have thought of it as a "sacrament?" But that

was what St. Bernard taught as was succinctly stated by Thomas Merton: "Advent is the 'sacrament' of the presence of God in His world, in the Mystery of Christ at work in History through His Church, preparing in a hidden, obscure way for the manifestation of His Kingdom." (*Seasons of Celebration*, Thomas Merton, p.61)

St. Bernard believed this "sacrament" was all part of the Divine plan as revealed by St. Paul in the Letter to the Ephesians: *With all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.* (NRSV: *Ephesians* 1: 8b-10). Merton continues:

"This plan is envisaged not as a future prospect but as a present *fact*. The "last things" are already present and realized in a hidden manner. The Kingdom of God is thus already "in the midst of us." But, the mystery can only be known by those who enter into it, who find their place in the Mystical Christ, and therefore find the mystery of Christ realized and fulfilled in themselves. For these, the Kingdom of God is mysteriously present. . . ."

"In (St. Bernard's) theology Advent does not merely commemorate the Incarnation as a historical event, nor is it

a mere devotional preparation for the Feast of Christmas, nor an anticipation of the Last Judgment. It is above all the "sacrament" of the Presence of God in the world and in time in His Incarnate Word, in His Kingdom, above all His presence in our own lives as our Savior." (*Seasons of Celebration*, p.64)



As we begin Advent perhaps we can spend some time thinking about the season as St. Bernard has described it, perhaps even spending some time in *lectio* or prayer thinking about the "sacrament" of the Presence of God in our lives. In addition St. Bernard gives us three questions specifically that we should ponder that cause us to sometimes feel helpless and we should ask ourselves:

1. Why we are deceived in our judgments of good and evil;
2. Why our attempts to do good fail, lead to nothing;
3. Why we do not succeed in our efforts to resist evil.

Merton goes on to explain that it is the "presence of Christ that allows us to overcome these obstacles. By faith He dwells in our heart and shows us how to judge between good and evil. . . .He cannot deceive or be deceived. He is the wisdom of God, always ready to teach us. Yet in order to have His light, we must use the grace He gives us to turn to Him in our difficulties. By fortitude He strengthens our weakness, so that we can do all things in Him. He never grows tired, for He is the power of God, ever ready to revive us and lift us up. But we must call upon Him for help in our battles. Finally, He "stands for" us, He resists within us. If He be for us, who is against us?"

"The secret of spiritual fortitude is for us to abandon ourselves to Christ, the power of God, and then He Himself will overcome evil and deliver us from forces that we would never be capable of resisting by ourselves. This is the fortitude of faith." (*Seasons of Celebration*, p. 65)

Desert Wisdom

It depends on us whether we wish to be saved.

Apophthegmata Patrum

It was said of Abba Gelasius that he was often assailed by the thought of going to the desert. One day he said to his disciple, 'Do me the favour, brother, of bearing with whatever I may do, and say nothing to me for the whole of this week.'

Taking a reed, he began to walk in his little atrium. When he was tired, he sat down a little, then stood up again to walk about. When evening came, he said to himself, 'He who walks in the desert does not eat bread, but herbs; so because you are weary, eat a few vegetables.' He did so, then said to himself again, 'He who is in the desert does not lie in a bed, but in the open air; so do the same.' So he lay down and slept in the atrium. He walked thus for three days in the monastery, eating a few chicory leaves in the evening and sleeping the whole night in the open air and he grew weary. Then, taking the thought which troubled him, he refuted it in these words, 'If you are not able to perform the works of the desert, live patiently in your cell, weeping for your sins, without wandering here and there. For the eye of God always sees the works of a man and nothing escapes him and he knows those who do good.'

The Ordo

Listed are the Feast days and Memorials that are observed at the Monastery and follows the Ordo of the American Cassinese Congregation. You can also see the observed feast days by going to: <http://oblatesosbbelmont.org/ordo/>.

NOVEMBER

17 Thirty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time
 21 Presentation of the Virgin Mary. Memorial.
 22 Cecilia, Memorial
 24 Sun. Jesus Christ, King of the Universe. Solemnity
 30 Andrew, Apostle. Feast.

DECEMBER

1 First Sunday of Advent (Week I)
 3 Francis Xavier, Memorial.
 7 Ambrose, Bishop, Memorial.
 8 Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary Solemnity.
 9 Monday of the Second Week of Advent (Week II)
 12 Our Lady of Guadalupe. Feast
 13 Lucy, Memorial
 14 John of the Cross, Memorial
 15 Third Sunday of Advent (Week III)