



Oblates of St. Benedict Belmont Abbey

December, 2012



Meeting in December

Oblates will meet in December on the 16th.

First year novices will continue reading *Finding Sanctuary: Monastic Steps for Everyday Life* by Abbot Christopher Jamison and *Benedict of Nursia: His Message for Today* by Anselm Grun. They should continue to read "Part One: Everyday Life" in the Jamison book. (At the last meeting, we interrupted the book to join second year novices to discuss the topic of humility).

Second year novices need to continue with *The Life of St. Benedict* by Terrence Kardong and *A Guide to Living in the Truth: Saint Benedict's Teaching on Humility*, by Fr. Michael Casey, OCSO.

Oblates will review chapter 5 of Michael Casey's *Toward God: The Ancient Wisdom of Western Prayer*.

The Dignity of Yard Work

Adapted from "The Dignity of [Yard] Work: A Catholic Perspective, posted at <http://thecatholicwife.net/>"

Idleness is the soul's enemy, so therefore at determined times the brothers (and sisters) out to be occupied with manual labor, and again at determined hours in Lectio Divina. (Rule of St. Benedict: 48:1)

For the past couple of days, I've developed a pretty strong attachment to my leaf blower, a precious gift I received from my sister last summer. The degree of instant-gratification neatness it creates is astonishing and I'm blown away (HA!) by how easy it is to use. Within the past week I've used it at least every other day. Over the top? Maybe. But I'm enthusiastic. My back yard is pretty big and the number of leaves it collects is too daunting for even my broad-toothed monster rake to handle.

Monday I took care of the back – blew off the patio and mowed. Tuesday I raked up all the pesky magnolia pods (akin to pine cones of the north, but heavier, sharp, and hazardous to my mower's health), blew the leaves from the pavement to the yard to suck them up while I cut the grass (a simple approach I learned from my neighbor), and took care of the trodden-black leaves on the side of the house. Hours and hours of time outside and back-breaking, soul-stirring work.

And I loved it. Every single minute.

On both occasions, I came in filthy as sin and in humbling need of a good clean-up; but the satisfaction I felt from doing such hard work was amazing. My yard was beautiful and conducive for toddler-play and the patio was a clean place for Andrew and me to sit and enjoy the milder weather. Here in Looziana, any unattended property is fire ant and spider heaven, so keeping it tidy keeps my kids bite-free. Plus, I love being able to live in my back yard, which lies untouched and unseen for the duration of the oppressively hot summers.

I tried articulating the level of thrill I get from yard work to Andrew. Though he doesn't mind a good morning of grass-cutting, he acknowledges my pleasure as singular. If I get to be outside enjoying mid-70 temps, walking behind a mower and blowing off the patio add to the experience. Truly, though, this isn't about just being outside. It's about work. Hard work. And the dignity found therein.

One of the seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching is The Dignity of Work and Rights of Workers (check out Bl. JPPII's *Laborem Exercens* and Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*). Though it discusses work as making a living and earning income to stabilize one's own domestic church (the family), it more generally focuses on work as a participation in God's creation. In working, we're cultivating God's gifts – accepting them, tending to them, keeping them, and allowing them to continue. I think this is the underlying theme of my seemingly inexplicable joy in yard work and it can be found in any good work – staying at home with kids, teaching, insurance, food service, odd jobs around the house, delivering a baby, name it! A job completed in the spirit of fostering God's gifts (like your home or yard!) is one that gives the worker a sense of humble self-worth because he understands how his existence relates to others, especially God. I love this quotation from Blessed John Paul II's encyclical, which elaborates in a much better way:

Work is a good thing for man – a good thing for his humanity- because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes "more a human being".

And that's exactly it. I feel more human when I'm working hard and especially when I get to enjoy the fruits of my labor so immediately. Work has a terrible stigma pinned to it that reads NO FUN and UNDESIRABLE because of the effort it requires that some would rather not exert. It's often used as punishment or discipline, but consider that work itself was divinely assigned to man before the fall. Genesis 1:28 calls man to "fill the earth and subdue it" and two verses earlier, God gave man dominion over creation. You can't take what you have and just leave it alone – you have to take care of it in order to reap its benefits.

Don't get me wrong – I am not this enthusiastic for all of my work as a wife, mother, and homeowner. There are times when the idea of working by the sweat of my brow doesn't sound so exhilarating and I'd rather just get some R&R or do something that excites. I'm not nearly as giddy over my washer, dryer, or dish scrubber as I am over my leaf blower; but if we get beyond the hedonistic idea of "it's not fun so I'm not going to," and see work for what it truly is – a glorifying participation in God's creation and fulfillment of a divine order – there is satisfaction and joy to be found.

Archbishop Fulton Sheen on Christmas



1. Christmas did something to time.

"Christmas did something to time. Everyone is born in a certain era of time over which he or she has no control. But when Eternity came to this earth and established His beachhead in Bethlehem, time was struck with such a terrific impact that it was split in two. From that moment on, all periods in history have been divided into the period before Christ (B.C.) and the period after Christ (A.D.), Anno Domini, the year of the Lord."

2. Christmas did something to space.

Not only was time split into two, but space was turned upside down. The Greeks believed that their gods dwelt on Olympian heights. This worried them to some extent, because if God is "way up there," what does He know about our sufferings? They wanted a God who was in the dust of human lives. What did God in the heights know about being a refugee, about being homeless? Was He ever betrayed? Did He ever suffer? Did He ever come close to death? But when the Son of God was born under the floor of the world in Bethlehem, He shook the world to its very foundations. More than that, He turned space upside down. Before that, mothers always used to say, as they held children in their arms, Heaven is way, way up there"; but the day the Woman held the Babe in her arms, it began to be true to say that she "looked down" to heaven.

3. Christmas is the discovery of the Missing Link.

Christmas is the discovery of the Missing Link - not the link that binds us to the beast, but the link that binds us to God. The Divine Babe was the real Cave Man, for He was born in a cave of Bethlehem. The light that is shining in His eyes is not that of a beast coming to the dawn of reason, but the light of God coming to the darkness of humanity; His name is not Pilt-down, but Christ. Being God and Man, He is the link between both. Life is now discovered to be not a push from below, but a gift from above.

Lovely Lady Dressed in Blue

Lovely Lady dressed in blue -----
Teach me how to pray!
God was just your little boy,
Tell me what to say!

Did you lift Him up, sometimes,
Gently on your knee?
Did you sing to Him the way
Mother does to me?

Did you hold His hand at night?
Did you ever try
Telling stories of the world?
O! And did He cry?

Do you really think He cares
If I tell Him things -----
Little things that happen? And
Do the Angels' wings

Make a noise? And can He hear
Me if I speak low?
Does He understand me now?
Tell me -----for you know.

Lovely Lady dressed in blue -----
Teach me how to pray!
God was just your little boy,
And you know the way.



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://oblatesosbelmont.org/ordo/>.

DECEMBER

16 Third Sunday of Advent (Week III)
23 Fourth Sunday of Advent (Week IV)
25 Christmas Day, Solemnity with Octave
26 Stephen, First Martyr, Feast
27 John, Apostle, Feast
28 Holy Innocents, Feast
30 Feast of the Holy Family (Week I)
31 Sylvester I

JANUARY

1 Mary, the Mother of God, Solemnity
2 Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, Memorial
6 Solemnity of the Epiphany of the Lord (Week II)
13 The Baptism of the Lord, Feast (Sunday of Week III)

Ordinary Time (Week I)

15 Maurus and Placid, (Patron of Oblates), Memorial (Abbot Placid's name day)
17 Anthony
20 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time; Fabian; (Week II)

Meeting in January

Oblates will meet in January on the 20th. Should you have any questions, please contact:
George K. Cobb, OblSB,
Belmont Abbey Monastery
100 Belmont-Mt. Holly Road,
Belmont, NC 28012
gkcobb0428@gmail.com.