

Oblates of St. Benedict

Oblate Program at Belmont Abbey, NC

December, 2015

WATCHING

"Take ye heed, watch and pray; for ye know not when the time is." Mark xiii. 33.

...Let us consider this most serious question – What is it to watch with Christ? I consider this word watching a remarkable word; remarkable because the idea is not so obvious as might appear at first sight, and next because our Lord and his disciples inculcate it. We are not simply to believe, but to watch; not simply to love, but to watch; not simply to obey, but to watch; to watch for what? For that great event, Christ's coming...

Now what is watching?

Do you know the feeling in matters of this life, of expecting a friend, expecting him to come, and he delays? Do you know what it is to be in unpleasant company, and to wish for the time to pass away, and the hour strike when you may be at liberty? Do you know what it is to be in anxiety lest something should happen which may happen or may not, or to be in suspense about some important event, which makes your heart beat when you are reminded of it, and of which you think the first thing in the morning?

Do you know what it is to have a friend in a distant country, to expect news of him, and to wonder from day to day what he is now doing, and whether he is well? Do you know what it is so to live upon a person who is present with you, that your eyes follow his, that you read his soul, that you see all its changes in his countenance, that you anticipate his wishes, that you smile in his smile, and are sad in his sadness, and are downcast when he is vexed, and rejoice in his successes? To watch for Christ is a feeling such as all these; as far as feelings of this world are fit to shadow out those of another.

He watches for Christ who has a sensitive, eager, apprehensive mind; who is awake, alive, quick-sighted, zeal-



Holy Silence (Hesychia)

ous in seeking and honoring him; who looks out for him in all that happens, and who would not be surprised, who would not be over-agitated or overwhelmed, if he found that he was coming at once.

And he watches *with* Christ, who, while he looks on to the future, looks back on the past, and does not so contemplate what his Savior has purchased for him, as to forget what he has suffered for him. He watches with Christ, who ever commemorates and renews in his own person Christ's cross and agony, and gladly takes up that mantle of affliction which Christ wore here, and left behind him when he ascended. And hence in the Epistles, often as the inspired writers

show their desire for his second coming, as often do they show their memory of His first, and never lose sight of his crucifixion in his resurrection.

Thus if St. Paul reminds the Romans that they "wait for the redemption of the body" at the Last Day, he also says, "If so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." If he speaks to the Corinthians of "waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," he also speaks of "always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body."

If he writes to the Philippians of "the power of [Christ's] resurrection," he adds at once "and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death." If he

The next Oblate meeting will be December 20 at 3:30 PM in the Gallagher Room. We will also be having a small Christmas gathering and everyone is requested to bring a refreshment to share.

consoles the Colossians with the hope "when Christ shall appear," of their "appearing with him in glory," he has already declared that he [Paul] "fills up that which remains of the afflictions of Christ in his flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." [Rom. 8:17-28; 1 Cor.1:7; 2 Cor. 4:10; Phil. 3:10; Col.3:4, and 1:24.]

Thus the thought of what Christ is, must not obliterate from the mind the thought of what he was; and faith is always sorrowing with him while it rejoices. And the same union of opposite thoughts is impressed on us in holy communion, in which we see Christ's death and resurrection together, at one and the same time; we commemorate the one, we rejoice in the other; we make an offering, and we gain a blessing.

This then is to watch

To be detached from what is present, and to live in what is unseen. To live in the thought of Christ as he came once, and as he will come again. To desire his second coming, from our affectionate and grateful remembrance of his first. And this it is, in which we shall find that men in general are wanting. They are indeed without faith and love also; but at least they profess to have these graces, nor is it easy to convince them that they have not. For they consider they have faith, if they do but own that the Bible came from God, or that they trust wholly in Christ for salvation; and they consider they have love if they obey some of the most obvious of God's commandments. Love and faith they think they have; but surely they do not even fancy that they watch. What is meant by watching, and how it is a duty, they have no definite idea; and thus it accidentally happens that watching is a suitable test of a Christian, in that it is that particular property of faith and love, which, essential as it is, men of this world do not even profess; that particular property, which is the life or energy of faith and love, the way in which faith and love, if genuine, show themselves...

...Year passes after year silently; Christ's coming is ever nearer than it was. O that, as he comes nearer earth, we may approach nearer heaven! O, my brethren, pray him to give you the heart to seek him in sincerity. Pray him to make you in earnest. You have one work only, to bear your cross after him. Resolve in his strength to do so. Resolve to be no longer beguiled by "shadows of religion," by words, or by disputings, or by notions, or by high professions, or by excuses, or by the world's promises or threats.

Obey with the best heart you have

Pray him to give you what Scripture calls "an honest and good heart," or "a perfect heart," and, without waiting, begin at once to obey him with the best heart you have. Any obedience is better than none. Any profession which is disjoined from obedience, is a mere pretence and deceit. Any religion which does not bring you nearer to God is of the world. You have to seek his face; obedience is the only way of seeking him. All your duties are obediences.

If you are to believe the truths he has revealed, to regulate yourselves by his precepts, to be frequent in his ordinances, to adhere to his church and people, why is it, except because he has bid you? And to do what he bids is to obey him, and to obey him is to approach him. Every act of obedience is an approach – an approach to him who is not far off, though he seems so, but close behind this visible screen of things which hides him from us. He is behind this material framework. Earth and sky are but a veil going between him and us. The day will come when he will rend that veil, and show himself to us. And then, according as we have waited for him, will he recompense us.

If we have forgotten him, he will not know us. But "blessed are those servants whom the Lord, when he comes, shall find watching... He shall gird himself, and make them sit down to eat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants" (Luke 12:37, 38). May this be the portion of every one of us! It is hard to attain it; but it is woeful to fail. Life is short; death is certain; and the world to come is everlasting. **John Henry Newman, *Sermon 22***

NECROLOGY



DECEMBER

- 1 Fr. Cuthbert Allen(1977)
- 5 Fr. Eugene Egan(1940)
- 6 Br. Albert Popp(1924)
- 7 Fr. Boniface Bauer(1974)
- 8 Fr. Philip Tierney(1971)
- 9 Abbot Jude Cleary(2005)
- 21 Br. Alphonse Schoene(1889)
- 23 Prior Willibald Baumgartner(1930)
- 25 Br. Louis Marschall(1945)
- 26 Fr. Jerome Dollard(1985)
- 27 Br. Obl. Thomas MacPherson
(1955)
- 28 Fr. Mark Cassidy(1928)
- 28 Abbot Walter Coggin(1999)
- 29 Br. Joseph Ringelstaetter(1920)
- 30 Fr. Robert Brennan(1964)
- 30 Fr. Aloysius Wachter(1977)

JANUARY

- 3 Fr. Gerard Rettger(1944)
- 4 Fr. Herman Grones(1936)
- 5 Fr. Benedict Rettger(1952)
- 7 Fr. Paul Milde(1979)

WHO REPRESENTED US AT THE FIRST CHRISTMAS?



I remember the election of Pope John the XXIII in 1958. In December of that year he celebrated his first Christmas Mass as pope, and it was the first time that the Church had the technology to broadcast the Christmas Mass worldwide over radio and television. . .

But even though this was a brand new pope, most people were expecting just another Christmas homily.

And a homily can be very boring especially if it is about the same subject every year for 2000 years. After all, how many times can you tell the story of Christmas without repeating yourself?

So people were prepared to be bored. The mood seemed to be: ho-hum, another Christmas homily.

The pope walked up to the microphone to give his talk. Speaking Italian, he began:

"Who represented us at the First Christmas?"

"If you say it was the angels, you would be wrong because angels do not have bodies like us. If you say it was the shepherds, you would be wrong because the shepherds were farmers, and most of us are not farmers.

"If you say it was the Wise Men, you would be wrong because the Wise Men were wealthy and highly educated, but most of us are poor and stupid.

"I will tell you who it was that represented us at the First Christmas: It was—the jackass."

You could see the people in the church stirring and murmuring. . . this was truly an awkward moment.

Then the pope said:

"The jackass was always feeling sorry for himself. He felt frustrated and thought his life was too monotonous—meaningless. He was habitually unhappy. He would always walk around with a long face or, what the Italians call 'una faccia lunga.'

"One day as he was walking, he looked up and saw a horse. He thought to himself: 'What a beautiful animal the Lord made when he created the horse. Look at him. He's gorgeous. He has a magnificent mane, and he can run like the wind.

"Me—I am short and ugly. I have no mane and cannot run very fast at all.'

"He continued walking with a long face and, as he walked, he looked up and saw a camel. This time he said to himself, 'What a wonderful creature God made when he made the camel. Look at him. He can go for days—as the pope put it—giorni, giorni—days, days—without any water.'

ORDO

DECEMBER

- 3 Francis Xavier, Memorial
- 6 Second Sunday of Advent (Week II)
- 7 Ambrose, Memorial
- 8 Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. Solemnity
- 12 Our Lady of Guadalupe. Feast
- 13 Third Sunday of Advent (Week III)
- 14 John of the Cross, Memorial
- 20 Fourth Sunday of Advent (Week IV)
- 21 Peter Canisius, Memorial
- 25 Nativity of the Lord, Solemnity
- 26 Stephen, First Martyr. Feast
- 27 Holy Family. Feast (Week I)
- 28 Holy Innocents, Martyrs, Feast

JANUARY

- 1 Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
- 2 Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, Memorial
- 3 Epiphany (Week II)
- 5 John Neumann, Bishop, Memorial



"Me—I am always thirsty and can never seem to slake my thirst."

"Again he continued walking with a long face when suddenly he looked up and saw a cow. He said to himself: 'What a marvelous creature God made when he made the cow. Look at her. She is very friendly and gets along with everyone. The cow not only gives milk to nourish her own but she nourishes other creatures as well."

"Me—I cannot nourish anyone. I am not easy to get along with, and I am very stubborn."

"Continuing with his walk, he looked up and saw a baby in a manger. There was something special about the baby—something in the look of the baby's eyes that captured his attention. So he walked up to the manger and sat down by the infant."

"It was a cold wintry night and the baby was cold."

Here the pope described a bit of the better part of our nature. He said that no one likes to see children suffer. Even people who do not like children do not like to see them suffer.

Then the pope said that the jackass began breathing heavily on the baby.

The next thing everyone heard was the pope panting loudly into the microphone. He was a very large man and so it sounded something like this: "Uhh huh..... Uhh huh..... Uhh huh."

He continued, "After a while, the baby reached up and patted the muzzle of the jackass—as if to say: 'Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for keeping me warm on this cold wintry night.'

"Now, for the first time in his life, the jackass was happy. He no longer felt sorry for himself. He had found

meaning and purpose in his life, and all his troubles went away."

And then the pope said something that absolutely astounded the entire world.

"For that's the way it is with Almighty God. All he wants is the warm breath of a living soul. You give him that and he will take care of the rest."

Let me repeat that. It is so powerful and compelling that I want you to remember it for the rest of your life: "For that's the way it is with Almighty God. All he wants is the warm breath of a living soul. You give him that and he will take care of the rest."

The whole world was overwhelmed. Stunned. There was utter silence for a very long time.

Even then, as a young man, I said to myself: "What could anyone possibly say after that? Get off the podium. There is nothing more anyone can add to that statement."

But finally the silence was broken; the pope spoke again. He said—and I must give you the Italian first: *Da un asino a tutti voi altri asini, Buona Natale.*

Which means: "From one ass to all you other asses: Merry Christmas."

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