

Oblates of St. Benedict

Oblate Program at Belmont Abbey, NC

December, 2017



Abbot Oscar C. Burnett, O.S.B.
Seventh Abbot of Belmont Abbey

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we have gathered today for our second Thanksgiving celebration this year, for we are here to give praise and thanks to God for the wonderful life and service of Abbot Oscar Burnett.

The meaning of our celebration is set out clearly for us by our Holy Father Benedict in his Rule. In setting out the criteria for discerning the authenticity of the calling of one who comes to the monastery, he writes: "The concern must be whether the novice truly seeks God and whether he shows eagerness for the Work of God, for obedience and for trials. The novice should be clearly told all the hardships and difficulties that will lead him to God" (RB 58.7-8). Among the Instruments of Good Works, he instructs his monks to "yearn for everlasting life with holy desire" (RB 4.46), and "to keep death daily before one's eyes" (RB 4.47), not out of dread but as a sign of confidence in that everlasting life which is to come. Finally, at the conclusion of the Prologue to his Rule, St. Benedict writes: "Never swerving from his instructions, then, but faithfully observing his teaching in the monastery until death, we shall through patience

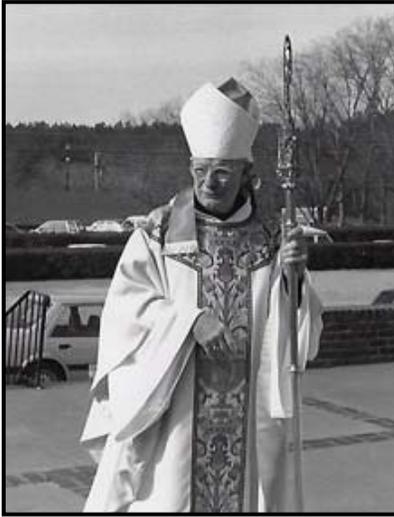
share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom. Amen" (Prol. 50). It is because Abbot Oscar did just that, faithfully observed Christ's teaching in the monastery until death, that we believe most firmly that he has deserved to share in his kingdom. And that is why we celebrate today this second Thanksgiving Day this year.

Having dedicated his life to service of God and neighbor out of love for Jesus Christ, Abbot Oscar experienced those "hardships and difficulties" of which St. Benedict spoke and they did, in fact, "lead him to God". He learned early the obligation of service, from a good and loving family, to whom he was devoted, from his schooling at Sacred Heart Parochial School and Benedictine Military School, from the sense of duty to his country which led him to enlist in the armed forces in the closing months of World War II. This obligation of a good man to place his talents at the service of others runs like a guiding thread through Abbot Oscar's life. St. Gregory the Great, in his *Commentary on the Book of Kings* (In Reg. III.5.30) writes: "Contemplation enables us not only to understand the Scripture that is already written, but even to write if it does not yet exist, and then dispose ourselves daily to carry out God's will through its teachings." Abbot Oscar not only understood Jesus' words to us today in the Gospel, *Amen, amen I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat: but if it dies, it produces much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will preserve it for eternal life*, but he continually wrote these words in the story of his own life and disposed himself daily to carry out God's will. Anyone who has undertaken the service

The next Oblate meeting will be December 17 at 2:30 PM in the Gallagher Room . We will also be having a small Christmas gathering and everyone is requested to bring a refreshment to share.



of exercising authority knows that it involves endless demands to die to oneself, whether one is a parent, officer of the government, business manager or church leader. As the Cistercian Michael Casey reminds us, "The determinant of genuinely authoritative action is not the needs or wishes of the one in authority, but the situation of those on whose behalf authority is exercised" (*A Guide to Living in the Truth*, 101). With his considerable talent and ability, Abbot Oscar filled at one time or another virtually

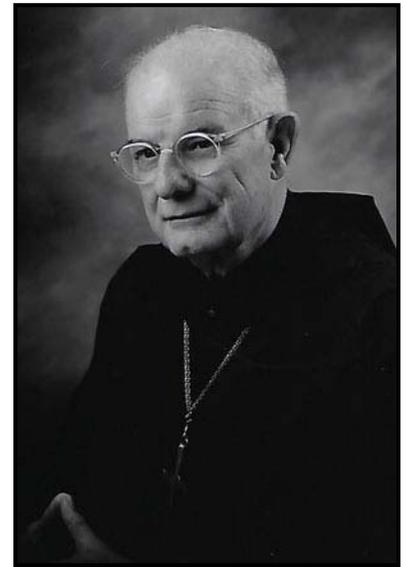


all the positions of responsibility that exist at Belmont Abbey. By faithfully fulfilling all these offices Abbot Oscar likewise understood and lived the words of the Book of Wisdom: *God tried them and found them worthy of himself. As gold in the furnace, he proved them and as sacrificial offerings he took them to himself.* Most especially Abbot Oscar fulfilled the Lord's words to us today regarding that grain of wheat which must die when, on December 21, 1991, at the age of sixty-five when most men are ready to savor retirement, he carried out the vows of stability and obedience he had professed and accepted the election of his confreres to serve as seventh abbot of Belmont Abbey at a critical time in the history of our community. At no small personal cost, he faithfully carried out his service to our community, the first abbot in forty years to complete a full term of office. It was on this very day, eighteen years ago, that Abbot Oscar received a certain rest from his labors, though he continued his monastic life with us until Tuesday, and carried on his beautiful ministry of consolation, encouragement and love through his beautiful letters and notes.

But now that service has ceased as of last Tuesday, the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In this final illness of the past few months, the Scripture was again understood and lived: *Chastised a little, they shall be greatly blessed.* Now, it is up to us to understand and live the words of St. Paul given to us today: *For we know that if our earthly dwelling, a tent, should be destroyed, we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands, eternal in heaven.* In the midst of our loss, this is our joy. Likewise, we can take consolation in the Apostle's words: *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive recompense according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil.*

The amount of good that Abbot Oscar accomplished in his lifetime is patently obvious. As a monk, he fulfilled the evangelical mission of Benedictine monastic life by bearing steadfast witness to the church and the world that one must prefer nothing whatsoever to Christ (RB 72.11) and that the true purpose of every life is truly to seek God. As priest, he ministered to sacraments and the Word of life, building up the church and leading others to Jesus. For all who [love] Belmont Abbey College and appreciate its inestimable value to the church and to the world, he saved the college from certain demise, even serving a year as both abbot and president. But far more important than his effort of stabilizing the institution was his work as legendary Dean of Students and vibrant and active campus minister. For in these positions, by his genuine love, his discipline and his gift of himself, Father Oscar, the "Big O" crafted souls for goodness in this world and eternal life in the world to come. He brought Father Bede Lightner back home to Belmont Abbey, a good work that is surely glorious in God's sight. He was our abbot, who expended himself totally in our service.

Finally, to understand our Thanksgiving celebration today, we return to the Rule of St. Benedict, which guided Abbot Oscar's life for the past sixty years. I think Abbot Oscar always kept in mind that final Instrument of Good Works in Chapter four of the Rule: "Finally, never lose hope of God's mercy." That is the good work set out for us today as we send our abbot, our brother, uncle, mentor and friend to the reward promised God's faithful servants." It is because of the boundless, fathomless mercy of God, who sent his only Son to save us through his sacrifice on the cross and his glorious resurrection that we can even dare rejoice today. Abbot Oscar often reminded us that "Every saint is a reformed sinner, and every sinner is a saint in the making." The making is now complete for Oscar Caldwell Burnett, our abbot.



Abbot Oscar was faithful to his word to remain faithful in the monastery until death. It is with absolute confidence that we rejoice that Jesus will be faithful also to his word: *Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there also will my servant be. The Father will honor whoever serves me.*

Abbot Placid Solari, OSB
Mass of Christian Burial
November 25, 2017

ADVENT: THE "SACRAMENT" OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN THE WORLD

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)

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 Gronos(1936)
- 5 Fr. Benedict Rettger(1952)
- 7 Fr. Paul Milde(1979)
- 8 Br. Benedict Marschall (1945)
- 9 Fr. Anselm Biggs (2001)

FR. ELIAS AND LECTIO DIVINA



Fr. Elias Correa-Torres joined us for our meeting on November 19th for a short introduction to *Lectio Divina*. Father was most helpful in clarifying the questions the Oblates had concerning *Lectio* and lead the group through a short group session and then answered questions. His help is most appreciated.

Electronic copies of the handouts are available. Please email George Cobb at gkcobb0929@gmail.com if you would like a copy.

FOR THE DECEMBER 17TH MEETING

The **Scripture study** for the first half of the meeting concerns Exodus 22:20; Leviticus 19:33-34; and Leviticus 23:22. The questions to ponder before the meeting are:

1. What can you recall from a time when you relied on the hospitality of others or when you were called upon to host a relative stranger?
2. What experiences have you had of feeling like an outsider? (This could occur in a neighborhood or town, a parish or a workplace)
3. When has a previous experience of some kind served as a life lesson for you?
4. How would you describe the difference between banning mistreatment and requiring love? Does it challenge you in a way to know that God's law requires such love?
5. Who is our neighbor today? Who are we being asked to love in practical ways?
6. Many of us are not in the business of farming. Nonetheless how could we cultivate an attitude of sharing from the best we have to offer?

BLESSING OF AN ADVENT WREATH

The use of the Advent Wreath is a traditional practice which has found its place in the Church as well as in the home. The blessing of an Advent Wreath takes place on the First Sunday of Advent or on the evening before the First Sunday of Advent.

When the blessing of the Advent Wreath is celebrated in the home, it is appropriate that it be blessed by a parent or another member of the family.

All make the sign of the cross as the leader says:

Our help is in the name of the Lord.

Response (R/.) Who made heaven and earth.

Then the Scripture, Isaiah 9: (lines 1-2 and 5-6) or Isaiah 63 (lines 16-17 & 19) or Isaiah 64 (lines 2-7) is read:

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

R/. Thanks be to God.

With hands joined, the leader says:

Lord our God, we praise you for your Son, Jesus Christ: he is Emmanuel, the hope of the peoples, he is the wisdom that teaches and guides us, he is the Savior of every nation.

Lord God, let your blessing come upon us as we light the candles of this wreath.

May the wreath and its light be a sign of Christ's promise to bring us salvation.

May he come quickly and not delay.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

R/. Amen.

The blessing may conclude with a verse from "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel":

O come, desire of nations, bind
in one the hearts of humankind;
bid ev'ry sad division cease
and be thyself our Prince of peace.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
shall come to thee, O Israel.

—*From Catholic Household Blessings & Prayers*



BISHOP 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.



ORDO

DECEMBER

- 3 First Sunday of Advent (Week I)
- 7 Ambrose, Memorial
- 8 Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. Solemnity
- 10 Second Sunday of Advent (Week II)
- 12 Our Lady of Guadalupe. Feast
- 13 Lucy, Memorial
- 14 John of the Cross, Memorial
- 17 Third Sunday of Advent (Week III)
- 24 Fourth Sunday of Advent (Week IV)
- 25 Nativity of the Lord, Solemnity
- 26 Stephen, First Martyr. Feast
- 27 John, Apostle, Feast
- 28 Holy Innocents, Martyrs, Feast
- 31 Holy Family. Feast

JANUARY

- 1 Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God
- 2 Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, Memorial (Week II)
- 7 Epiphany, Solemnity (Week III)
- 8 Baptism of the Lord, Feast

ANTIPHONS FOR ADVENT AND CHRISTMAS

For those Oblates currently using the first edition of the *Oblate Psalter*, antiphons for use during Advent and Christmas are available in PDF format from the Oblate website:

http://oblatesosbbelmont.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Advent_Christmas.pdf

A link has been placed on the home page. It can be printed locally. Download the file and then print the pages as you need them. They are arranged by week so print two pages at a time (two pages will fit on one 8.5 x 11 piece of paper) and trim them so you can place them in the *Psalter*.

OBLATE PSALTERS READY

We currently have available a limited number of the *Oblate Psalter*. If you would like a copy please email George Cobb at gkcobb0929@gmail.com. The cost is \$15.00 a copy plus shipping if you want it mailed.

DECEMBER 26: STEPHEN THE FIRST MARTYR



For many, Christmas can be a very sentimental time of the year. Baby Jesus, pretty lights and decorations, parties and yes gifts. All good, and possibly for those who don't get caught up in the cultural tornado of frenzied activity (probably more than is realized), a very good time of the year. Sentiment is good and necessary, for in our lives we need warm spots, tear jerking movies and maybe a couple glasses of wine to open us up a bit when we are with friends from time to time. Yet just like fog, it is soon dissipated by the harsh reality of the searing heat of the sun. This is not a negative statement, but just the nature of our world....many experiences, not all of them pleasant that come on their own accord. How we deal or react to them is the question. Also the meaning we give them is also central; though perhaps not often thought about. Yet what we believe and truly have faith in, are what directs our lives, even if failure is often part of that journey.

So on the day after Christmas, the Church celebrates the martyrdom of St. Stephen. He died for "Who" happened at Christmas. I suppose we are called to die in many ways before the finale curtain call. In answering the call of grace; Stephen, long before he was stoned to death, died to a way of life that alienated him from God as well as others.

All relationships if they are to grow and mature require a death to self in one way or another. With Christ, this death-to-self allows for a certain kind of freedom to flower. I guess this freedom was expressed by Stephen, who on the point of death forgave and prayed for those who stoned him. That prayer was also said for Saul, who witnessed the stoning and approved of it. Stephen died with Christ; he also died for those who killed him and I believe his prayer, like the prayer of Christ on the Cross, was answered in the later conversion of Saul, who took on the name of Paul. So Stephen did die to old ways of being and took on the life of Christ, giving him the freedom to forgive and love his enemies. No small task this work of grace. For the human heart (well my heart) is not easily given over to love of enemies or of forgiveness. In Christ Jesus all things are possible; even the taming of the human heart.

I get glimmers of this reality. Of Christ, his love for all of us, and how each human existence takes on the life, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus....yet after a short time, I fall back asleep. Yet once the heart has been wounded by Infinite Love, it cannot go back to 'before'....the pursuit of God becomes more real, our failures more painful and self knowledge more pronounced. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God, because all that keeps us away from the love as manifested at Christmas will be burned away. Merciful love is often experienced as harsh and cruel, yet it is still love.

May all hearts O Lord, be wounded by your infinite love. Those that are fearful, or angry, or who do not believe, my enemies and those I struggle to love, may all be wounded, and surprised at the wonder of who you are. AMEN.

Br. Mark Dohle, OCSO
Holy Spirit Monastery

The January meeting of the Oblates will be on the 21st at 2:30 unless otherwise announced.