

## Oblate Program at Belmont Abbey, NC

February, 2018

#### **QUESTIONS FOR NEXT MEETING**

From the last Meeting: Make an effort to pay close attention to the people around you. What do they appear to be hungry for? What draws them together and what concerns them? As a follower of Jesus, what gifts already in your midst might you share with these same people? Could you invite someone to come to church, Oblates or to Bible study as a way of helping address their hungers?

The Exercise of Hospitality

The readings are from Romans 12:9-13, 1 Peter 4:7-10, and Hebrews 13:1-2

- 1. Why do you think hospitality may not receive the level of attention given to other Christian virtues?
- 2. After re-reading Romans 12:9-13 ask yourself which of these instructions or directives might need more attention in your faith community?
- 3. How might we foster hospitality as a vital aspect of Christian discipleship?
- 4. List the ways that Christian love is made practical when your exercise hospitality.
- 5. How important is listening and conversation to the expression of hospitality?
- 6. What is your attitude toward those seen as strangers? When has a chance encounter with someone different been an experience of grace for you?

7.

## HISTORICAL SURVEY OF LECTIO DIVINA

That not much is known about the exact nature of *lectio divina* may be explained by the fact that both its name and its practice generally fell into desuetude\*\* several centuries ago. Nowadays, thanks to modem research, it

 $\ ^{**}a$  doctrine holding that a statute may be officially discontinued because of its long disuse .

is possible to know the broad outlines of its history. We shall review it briefly. <sup>1</sup>



#### THE FATHERS

Lectio divina finds its roots in the Jewish religion, in the usage of the synagogue, in the "If meditation" (haga) of the Bible as practiced by the rabbis and their disciples. But one must wait till the time of Origen, the famous Alexandrian teacher, before the practice of lectio divina (thela andgnosis) appears in dear and perfect outline.<sup>2</sup>

Origen, who most probably learned this method from his Jewish masters, considers *lectio divina* as the necessary foundation of the entire ascetical life, of all spiritual understanding, of all contemplation.

In reality, Scripture does not constitute one instrument among others that help one to progress in the life of the spirit, nor is the reading of the Bible simply a pious exercise. We must rather say that the spiritual life of the Christian *consists of* the reading of the Bible, meditated, understood and lived. The Bible, together with the Incarnation and the Church, is the sensible manifestation of the presence of the Logos in history; it is the very voice of Christ which directs itself to his faithful by

The next Oblate meeting will be February 18, 2018 at 2:30 PM in the Gallagher Room.

means of the Church. From this it follows that every faithful Christians must dedicate themselves assiduously to *lectio divina*. Penetration into the mystery of Christ by way of Scripture takes place progressively, and its deep comprehension comes only after persistent reading interrupted by prayer. Rightly Denis Goree asserts that the Fathers of the golden age did no more than repeat, each in his own manner and in his own historical and cultural milieu, the ideas of Origen regarding the essential role that *lectio divina* plays in the contemplative life.

According to the Fathers, the reading of Scripture is a primary obligation of every Christian. The Fathers never tired of recommending: *vacare lectioni* (have leisure for lectio), *studere lectioni* (strive after lectio), *insistere lectioni* (persist in lectio).

We may say that the liturgy, the work of God's people, is largely a community *lectio divina*: the reading of the Bible alternates with meditation upon it in the singing of the psalms and the homily. But in order that it be truly profitable for the soul, it is necessary that community reading be fructified by personal reading done in private, which is, so to speak, a prolongation of the Word of God read in community. St. John Chrysostom, St. Ambrose of Milan and St. Caesarius of Aries lay emphasis on this point. What takes place in church must be extended by every Christian at home, because only in that way can the Word of God be appropriated.

For St. Gregory the Great as for Origen, *lectio divina* is not an isolated exercise in the life of the Christian. In a certain sense it may be said to be the *essential* since it would be no exaggeration to assert that, for the great pope — monk, the perfect Christian is the one who knows how  $\cdot$  to read Scripture, conscious that his reading engages his entire life.



## THE MONASTICS

St. John Chrysostom became indignant when people argued that the reading of Scripture was the business of monastics. No, he replied, it belongs to all who pride themselves on being Christians. As is clear, he was



#### ORDO

- 2 Presentation of the Lord. Feast.
- 4 Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time. (Week I)
- 5 Agatha, Virgin, Martyr. Memorial
- 6 Paul Miki, Religious, Missionary, Martyr, and His Companions, Martyrs. Memorial.
- 10 Scholastica, Virgin, Religious Founder. Feast.
- 11 Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time. (Week II)

#### LENT

- 14 Ash Wednesday
- 18 First Sunday of Lent (Week 1)
- 22 Chair of Peter, Apostle. Feast.
- 23 Polycarp, Bishop, Martyr. Memorial.
- 25 Second Sunday of Lent (Week II)

right. Nevertheless, the objection of his interlocutors was significant. The Bible was in the process of becoming the book of the monastic, and the monastic the person of the Bible.

Already the earliest solitaries and cenobites practiced *lectio divina* and learned extensive passages of the Scripture by heart, sometimes entire books, in order to "meditate them" without ceasing.

Pachomius, Horsiesi, Basil, Evagrius Ponticus, all the masters of the monastic life, heartily recommend *lectio divina*. Cassian, the great publicizer of monastic spirituality in the West, following Origen, insists on the power of spiritual renewal deriving from the direct reading of the Bible. not its conimentators. The cenobitic law-givers, in order to distinguish it from the readings of the Divine Office and other community acts, little by little codified the practice of *lectio divina*: they defined its horarium and the books that were to be read.

Thus, in the fifth and sixth centuries, *lectio* is already institutionalized in monasteries; it occupies a definite place in the horarium of the communities. According to all the rules, on workdays the monastics devoted a mini -mum of two and a maximum of three hours to reading.

St. Caesarius ordered that after the two regular hours of reading, one of the nuns should read aloud for another hour while the rest worked. According to a document in the Augustinian tradition, the *Ordo monasterii*, this reading occupied the middle of the day, from noon till 3.00 p.m. The Rule of St. Benedict prescribes three hours of reading in succession only in Lent (from 7:00 to 10:00 AM. approximately); during the summer reading was prescribed from 10:00 AM till noon, that is, when the heat increased, and those who desired to do so were allowed also to read during the siesta (a long hour): in the winter the monastics dedicated the first hour of the morning to reading, namely, when they left choir after Lauds until nine o'clock, and they continued their reading after the meal, except for those who had to learn the psalter by heart (*vacare psalmis*), until Compline. Sunday was the great



weekly day for *lectio divina*. The monastics gave to it all the time not occupied by the divine services, span from those assigned to particular tasks and to *negligentes* or *desidiosi* who could not or would not occupy themselves with reading or *meditatio*; such were given some work, lest they remain idle.



#### **NECROLOGY**

Please remember to pray for the following deceased monks of the Abbey.

### **FEBRUARY**

3 Br. Eugene O'Neil (1986)

8 Fr. Kenneth Geyer (2012)

18 Fr. William Regnat (1953)

24 Br. Aegidius Seier (1973)

24 Br. Gregory Corcoran (1990)

25 Fr. Melchior Reichert (1940)

28 Br. George Poellath (1963)

#### MARCH

3 Fr. Michael McInerney (1963)

10 Fr. Vincent Campbell (1965)

14 Fr. William Mayer (1904)

17 Br. Christian Hierl (1930)

18 Fr. Florian Checkhart (1951)

18 Fr. Joseph Tobin (1978)

21 Prior Nicholas Bliley (1943)

24 Br. Celestine Wiegerle (1928)

25 Fr. Patrick Dolon (1913)

28 Fr. Ambrose Gallagher (1946)

28 Fr. Richard Graz (1952)

In order to dedicate themselves to *lectio divina*, it was necessary for monastics to be able to read. Already Pachomius ordered that the novices had to learn to read, "though they might not desire to." The *Regula ad Virgines*, 18, of St. Caesarius of Aries ordained: "Let all monastics learn how to read." The same disposition recurs in the *Regula ad Monachos*, 23, as well as in the *Regula ad Virgines*, 26, of St. Aurelian. The *Regula Ferioli* asserts more solemnly, "Everyone who desires to be called 'monastic' has no right not to know how to read."

According to the Regula Magistri, lectio is done in this fashion: the monastics "gather by tens and listen to a reader; everyone in tum reads from the same book." At the same time one of the *literati* teaches reading to the children and the illiterate, and those who do not know the psalter practice its recitation". St. Benedict, on the other hand, wants the monastics to have their own book and seek the place best suited for their reading. Why? One reason seems obvious: the ancients liked to read aloud. Ordinarily they did not read solely by sight, but with the lips and ears as well, listening to the words they were pronouncing. That is why they sought solitude, recollection. The fact that each monastic received a book shows clearly that for St. Benedict lectio divina was a strictly personal matter; community readings were held at other times. One or two elders were debuted to check the monastery during the time assigned for read-ing to see if perhaps some bored monastic, instead of being devoted to lectio, engaged in idleness or vain chatter. During the summer siesta those who wanted to read had to do so by themselves (sibi), lest they disturb the others; this means that they read in the dormitory while the rest slept or tried to sleep.

The medieval monastics remained faithful to the practice of *lectio*, at least to a certain point, since, judging by certain texts, the impression arises that *lectio divina* was being weakened, disfigured, transformed and even forgotten, at least in some circles. Still there were notable personal and collective exceptions: St. Anselm, Rupert of Deutz, Peter of Celle and many others, as well as, above all, the first generations of Cistercians. The so — called "monastic theology" which had nourished itself on *lectio divina* now went into a lamentable decline.

From Reading God by Garcia M. Colombas, pp. 17-22

# AN EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE BASED ON CHAPTER 4 OF THE HOLY RULE OF ST. BENEDICT

General	☐ Have I been guilty of murmuring or detraction?
☐ Have I neglected to love the Lord God with all my	☐ Have I indulged in excessive talk, vain words, or un-
heart, all my soul, and all my strength, and my neighbor	fitting laughter?
as myself? If so, in what specific ways?	☐ Have I uttered evil and wicked words?
☐ In deed or in thought, have I killed, committed adul-	☐ Have I been jealous or given way to envy?
tery, stolen, coveted, or borne false witness?	☐ Have I loved strife?
☐ Have I failed to honor all men?	☐ Did I give in to vanity?
☐ Did I do to another what I would not have had done	☐ Have I been proud?
to me?	☐ Did I fail to reverence my elders in Christ?
☐ Did I prefer anything to the love of Christ?	☐ Did I fail to love those who are my brothers, juniors,
1 0	dependents, or pupils?
Self-Denial	☐ Have I, in any other way, forsaken charity?
☐ Have I been self-indulgent instead of denying myself	
in order to follow Christ?	Seeking First God's Kingdom
☐ Have I pampered my body or sought after delicate	☐ Have I been lax in fulfilling each day the command-
living, rather than chastising my body?	ments of God?
☐ Have I neglected fasting or abstinence?	☐ Did I neglect in my prayer the daily confessing of past
☐ Have I overindulged in wine or other beverages, or	sins?
verged on gluttony?	☐ Have I faltered in putting my hope in God?
☐ Have I been drowsy or slothful?	☐ Have I subtly or openly attributed the good that I see
☐ Did I immerse myself in worldly affairs rather than	in myself to myself rather than to God?
keeping aloof from them?	☐ Have I run away from acknowledging the evil I have
☐ Did I fulfill the desires of the flesh rather than hating	done, or tried to blame it on someone else?
my own will?	☐ Have I delayed taking the steps necessary to amend
☐ Have I sinned against chastity, modesty, or purity?	my sins, negligences, and failings?
, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	☐ Have I been remiss in smashing my evil thoughts on
Charity towards Neighbor	the rock of Christ the instant they came into my heart?
☐ Have I neglected, when it was possible, to relieve the	☐ Have I been lax in applying myself to frequent prayer
poor, clothe the naked, visit the sick, bury the dead, help	or lectio divina?
in affliction, or console the sorrowing?	☐ Did I fail to keep death daily before my eyes, with fear
☐ Have I gratifed anger or harbored a desire of revenge?	of the Day of Judgment and dread of hell?
☐ Have I fostered guile in my heart or made a feigned	☐ Have I not been desiring everlasting life with all spir-
peace?	itual longing?
☐ Have I failed to utter truth from heart and mouth?	☐ Have I failed to keep guard over the actions of my life
☐ Have I rendered evil for evil or done wrong to any-	by bearing in mind that God sees me everywhere?
one?	☐ Have I not sought the counsel of my spiritual father
☐ Did I feel or exhibit impatience when wronged?	when I should have done so?
☐ Have I hated my enemies or any man?	☐ Have I hidden evil thoughts from him?
☐ Did I neglect to pray for my enemies in the love of	☐ Have I shown poor obedience to the commands of
Christ?	those who are placed in authority over me?
☐ Have I avoided making peace with any adversary be-	☐ Did I seek a reputation for holiness rather than holi-
fore the setting of the sun?	ness itself?
☐ Have I fled persecution for justice's sake?	☐ Have I ever despaired of God's mercy?
☐ Have I rendered cursing for cursing, rather than a	·

The March meeting of the Oblates will be on the 18th at 2:30 unless otherwise announced.

blessing?