

# Oblates of St. Benedict

*Oblate Program at Belmont Abbey, NC*

*April, 2018*

## MEETING ROOM HAS CHANGED!

The Oblates meeting room has been moved to the old Music Building. Meetings will no longer be in the Gallagher Room. The new room is handicapped accessible and parking is immediately adjacent to the building. Meeting times remain at 2:30 PM. See you on April 15th!

**Directions.** Coming onto the main driveway into campus make a left at the top of the hill. Turn right into the first driveway. The old Music Building is immediately on your left.

## QUESTIONS FOR THE NEXT MEETING

We are now working on Chapter 2 of *Hope; An Anchor in Today's World*. The discussion are be based on Romans 8:18-27

1. When has a letter sent from a friend or mentor helped you to clarify your values or beliefs?
2. Paul's hope in God's glory surpasses any suffering. What spiritual practices help you to draw strength from his confident testimony?
3. For you, what or who has been a powerful and hope-filled witness of God's plan for the world? What is it about this person that demonstrates his or her hopefulness?
4. Read Romans 8:24-25 along with Hebrews 11:1. How do these passages help you to understand the difference between the biblical virtue of hope and simple optimism?
5. In Romans 8:25 Paul speaks of the connection between hope and endurance. Have you learned this lesson in your own lived experience? What challenges you most about this?

6.

7. How often do you direct your prayer to the Holy Spirit or specifically invite the Spirit to act in your life?
8. We sometimes focus on the promise that God knows our hearts (Rom 8:27; Ps 37:4), but how can we grow in our understanding of God's heart? And what difference might that make?

## *Living the Word*

In the weeks ahead, pay attention to the times when the words of prayer seem to be hard to find, times when you do better just to sit and call upon the Spirit to express your concerns to God. Are you growing in your awareness that hope can come springing forth even when you may feel sorrow or pain?

## ROOTS OF LECTIO DIVINA

*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* (*theia andgnosis*) appears in clear and perfect outline.

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 (cont. on page 3)

## DECORUM IN COMMUNITY

*Editor's Note: There is much in this short article that lends itself to life outside the Monastery. In these modern, high stress times we often make excuses why we do not follow what was once called basic manners. How often do we say "Thank You" to the person who cooked the meal or who waited on us at a restaurant. Or how do we act when someone cuts you off in traffic? Fr. Cummings reminds us of it's importance in this short selection from his book Monastic Practices.*

Decorum also looks towards others and asks what effect this behavior will have on others with whom we live. Will it disturb them? Will it interrupt the silence and solitude to which they have a right? Will it cause them pain in any way? Or embarrassment? Monastic decorum is a basic expression of fraternal charity. When decorum prevails, the abbey will enjoy peaceful, friction-free living.

Decorum, based on charity, was the legacy St Benedict desired to leave his communities when he came to the concluding chapters of his Rule. In chapter 72 the good zeal that his disciples ought to show is described with a new reference to St Paul's dictum 'prefer one another in honor' (Rom 12: 10). Spelling out this precept in greater detail, St Benedict wrote: 'Let the monks bear with great patience one another's infirmities, whether of body or behavior. Let them be eager to obey one another. Let no one pursue what he considers good for himself, but rather what will benefit the other.'

Monastic decorum in the concrete prescribes leaving things the way I myself would like to find them: cars with fuel in them or butter dishes with butter on them. When I finish a work project I should clean up the debris and put the tools away in good condition. Cleaning up after myself includes cleaning things like the dishes, shower or sink I have used.

I remember that someone else will have to use it after me. If I spill something, it is I who should clean it up, either immediately if it is going to be in someone else's way or at a more convenient later moment. If I have used the last of something, it is I who should replace, re-fill, or re-order it, or notify the one in charge, so that there will be something there when the next person comes for it. It takes only a little extra time to replace an item in common use. The next person will never know I did it, and never thank me for it, but he will be inconvenienced if I fail to take the time to do it.

The person who has no time to bother about such things may be pursuing only what is good for himself or herself. Monastic decorum means taking time, even for little

things. Things that affect other people are important, but people themselves are more important. Decorum implies taking time for people, for being sociable and listening to them, for anticipating their needs, for compassionating their problems and pains in a respectful, nonintrusive way. Gentlemanly or lady-like decorum is not prone to press one's own opinions or philosophies, one's own taste in music, art, literature, spirituality, on one's brothers or sisters. Instead of training and disciplining others, we prefer gently to let them be and become fully themselves in an environment of warmth, respect, and fraternal love.



John Cardinal Newman once wrote: 'It is almost a definition. of a gentleman to say that he is one who never inflicts pain.' Like a good host or hostess, the gentle person's great concern is to make others feel at ease and at home, and to spare them pain. When people live closely together, they are certain to bump against each other and even do injury unless each one exercises a gentle sense of decorum and courtesy. Courtesy oils the gears that intermesh in the monastic community, insuring friction-free relationships as much as possible. The social philosopher Ortega Y Gasset has observed that courtesy flourishes in countries where people live closely together, the only other alternative being communal self-destruction:

*Courtesy ... is a social technique that eases the collision and strife and friction that sociality is. Around each individual it creates a series of tiny buffers that lessen the other's bump against us and ours against the other. The best proof that this is so lies in the fact that courtesy was able to attain its most perfect, richest and most refined forms in countries whose population density was very great. Hence it reached its maximum where that is highest-namely, in the*



## ORDO

### APRIL

- 1 Resurrection of the Lord
- 8 Second Sunday of Easter (Mercy Sunday)
- 9 Annunciation of the Lord, Solemnity
- 10 Begin Week II
- 11 Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr, Memorial
- 15 Third Sunday of Easter (Week III)
- 21 Anselm, Bishop, Memorial
- 22 Fourth Sunday of Easter (Week IV)
- 25 Mark, Evangelist, Feast
- 28 Louis de Montfort, Priest, Opt. Memorial
- 29 Fifth Sunday of Easter (Week I)

## NECROLOGY



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

### APRIL

- 13 Br. Xavier Segerer (1903)
- 16 Br. Richard Kleiner (1940)

*Far East, in China and Japan, where men have to live too close to one another, almost on top of one another. Without all those little buffers, living together would be impossible. It is well known that the European in China produces the impression of a rude, crass, and thoroughly ill-educated being.<sup>6</sup>*

Living closely together in an abbey, we need the buffers that courtesy and monastic decorum can provide, to diminish the bumps and blows of community living. By being sensitive to others, we can often ease an uncomfortable situation and preserve our neighbor's dignity.

Fr. Charles Cummings, OCSO  
*Monastic Practices*, pp. 90-92

## ROOTS OF LECTIO DIVINA (cont. from page 1)

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 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 Gore 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 to read Scripture, conscious that his reading engages his entire life.

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 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.

Garcia M. Colombas



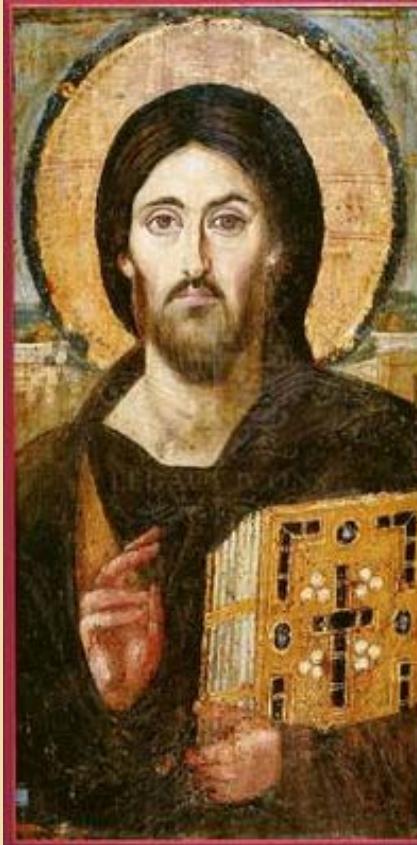
## THE CHRIST PANTOCRATOR

*Three icons were chosen to be the focal point of the Oblate meeting room: The Trinity by Andrie Rublev; Christ Pantocrator and the Theotokos Enthroned. This month follows a brief explanation of The Christ Pantocrator.*

The Christ Pantocrator of St. Catherine's Monastery at Sinai is one of the oldest Byzantine religious icons, dating from the sixth century AD. It is the earliest known version of the pantocrator style that still survives today, and is regarded by historians and scholars to be one of the most important and recognizable works in the study of Byzantine art as well as Eastern Orthodox Christianity

According to St. Mark's Gospel, chapter 4, the disciples, terrified by the furious storm that came upon their fishing boat, called out to Jesus for help. His powerful Word stilled the wind and the waves. The disciples asked themselves still terrified by their ordeal, "Who is this? Even the wind and waves obey Him!"

The beautiful and powerful icon known throughout the Church's history as "Pantocrator," tells us exactly who He is. Pantocrator-Lord omnipotent, Almighty, All-Powerful. In the earliest days of the Christian worship, when Roman persecution swirled around the daily life of Orthodox Catholic Christians, the icon most often seen in the Catacombs where these Christians worshipped was that of the Good Shepherd, the Lord who comforts His flock. Later in as new threats came upon the maturing Church from outside the Empire-various invasions of barbarians threatening the very homeland Empire; Huns, Vandals, Goths, and then Muslims,



Christians needed an emphasis on the Almighty God who sat enthroned as Emperor, Monarch and Ruler.

The word Pantocrator and the idea behind it appear in the book of Revelation. God speaks in Revelation 1:18, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Lord Who is, Who was and Who is to come, the "Pantocrator" (Almighty). The use of the multi-colored band that we usually see around the figure of the Pantocrator in the dome of Churches is based on Rev. 4:3 where the iris or rainbow is said to surround the throne of God. Normally the icon of Christ Pantocrator is the most remote of all the conventional poses. Christ is distant from us and sometimes His face is stern. Yet in other iconic depictions such as that of the Balkan Churches, we find the Pantocrator with dancing eyes. His face is sharp. His mouth tiny with the effort of suppressing a smile and his fingers thin and dancing where they hold the Book. The Gospel book in the icon is closed,

but Jesus knows what is inside; the Good news of God's love, of the destruction of sin and death and the enemies of God's Church as well as life everlasting for the faithful who have endured and whose names are written in the Book of Life. So what a wonderful icon to have and hold in our homes. An image of the God who constantly looks upon us; sees us in our sorrow and strife and comforts us, upholds us and stills the wind and waves that afflict us as well.

Legacy Icons

<http://legacyicons.com/christ-pantocrator-sinai-icon-x117/>

**PLEASE REMEMBER TO BRING YOUR OBLATE PSALTER TO ALL MEETINGS.**

**We are taking names to submit an order for the third printing of the Oblate Psalter. If you would like a copy please email George Cobb at [gkcobb0929@gmail.com](mailto:gkcobb0929@gmail.com)**

**The May meeting of the Oblates will be on the 20th at 2:30 unless otherwise announced.**