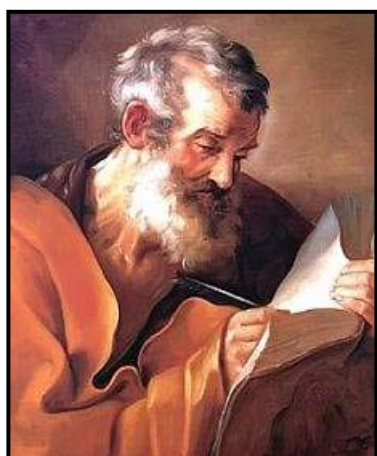




Oblates of St. Benedict

Oblate Program at Belmont Abbey, NC January-February, 2019

LECTIO DIVINA: PERSONAL READING



God has spoken, speaks now and continuously speaks to me. God is directed to me, here and now. That was the thinking of the early monastics, those professionals of *lectio divina*. They were persuaded that every word contained in Scripture is an utterance that God directs to every individual reader for his sanctification and salvation. Since the Bible presents

"the science of salvation, "they believed without the slightest doubt that everything in it has a personal, actual value for this life and with vistas for eternal life.

God directs a personal and unique message to each one of the readers. That personal message is contained in the great universal message addressed to all humanity. St. Gregory supplies the explanation. God, he says, has told us everything. God spoke to us once, and that is sufficient. There will be no further revelation. The Lord does not respond to everyone by private revelations, because God has prepared a Word that can solve all problems. In the Word of Scripture, if we know how to look, we shall find a solution to every one of our needs.... To mention but one example: if we are afflicted with some suffering or some bodily affliction, we find relief by knowing its hidden causes. If we do not know how to respond to life's trials, we have recourse to the Sacred Scripture. There we discover that Paul, tempted by the weakness of the flesh, was privileged to hear, 'My grace is sufficient for you: my power is at its best in weakness'.³ "In Sacred Scripture God has collected everything that can happen to any one, and as a model has given us the example of those who went before us."⁴

It is clear that God has not been confined to the Bible. God is a living God who speaks "now through Scripture, now

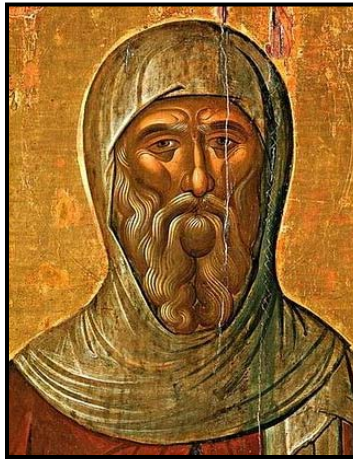
through secret inspiration." But the norm for all "secret inspiration" is the Bible. "A person readily falls into error if he does not know how to collate what he has discovered in secret contemplation with the eminent truth of Holy Scripture."⁵

This "reading God" intends to individualize and interiorize the great message directed to all people. David Stanley writes with great precision on this point: "By means of my reaction of faith, love and hope, the mystery becomes an event for me. It happens to me."⁶ A document from Christian antiquity, states: "We discover that what presents itself as new exists already from olden times and is reborn daily in the hearts of the faithful."⁷ The objective of *lectio divina* is in reality what St. Ignatius calls "an internal knowledge of the Lord who became incarnate for me so that I might love him more and follow him."⁸ The author of Deuteronomy has very well expressed the profound sentiment of Israel as to how in the Scriptures an event of the past turns into a contemporary experience. Even though he composed his book five or six hundred years after the making of the Covenant at Mt. Sinai, he can represent Moses as speaking across the centuries to his own contemporaries (that is, of the author): "Listen, Israel, to the laws and customs that I proclaim in your hearing today. Yahweh our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. It was not with our fathers that Yahweh made the covenant, but with us who are here, all living today."⁹ "It is precisely to create a similar experience, contemporaneous and personal to me, as a member of God's People, that *lectio divina* was created."

Fr. Stanley continues: "As a consequence (and that is the second step) one must reflect with faith on the literal sense already discovered in order to hear what the Risen Christ tells me through his Spirit when I read a passage at a given

The next Oblate meeting will be February 17, 2019 at 2:30 PM in the Geyer (Oblate) Room in the old Music Building.

The case of St. Antony illustrates this teaching. Antony, as is well known, was a good, pious Coptic youth. One day while he was on his way to church, he meditated on the life of the first Christians in Jerusalem as described in the Acts of the Apostles. They formed a wonderful community: they persevered in the teaching of the apostles, in the breaking of the bread and in prayer; they possessed all things in common; they were of one heart and one soul... Antony arrived at the Mass late, just as the Gospel of the rich young man was being proclaimed: "if you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give the proceeds to the poor; then come, follow me."¹¹ The young man refused the invitation of Jesus. ¹¹ But Antony accepted it. The Holy Spirit's words of the Gospel were directed to him. From that time forth the whole life of Antony was nothing but the voice.



Another example: Alexander, who later founded the celebrated monastery of the Acemates near Constantinople, likewise felt himself called to the monastic life while reading the Gospel. And the Gospel continued to inspire him very concretely. "Father," he used to ask the archimandrite Elias, "is everything written in the Gospel true? And if it is true, why do we not carry



it out?" At length Alexander with a number of companions under-took the holy adventure of living like the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, praising the Lord all the while.¹⁴

A third and last example: St. Theresa of the Child Jesus. "I am too tiny to climb the steep stairway of perfection. I searched the Holy Book and I read these words uttered by the Eternal Wisdom itself. 'Whosoever is a little one, let him continue my search and this is what I found: knees; as one whom the mother caresses, odious words never gladdened my heart Jesus. For that reason I see no need to striving to be smaller all the time.'"¹⁷ The basis of the perfect definition of "sp

Christ de-mands it. "To be small is to recognize one's nothingness, to hope for everything from God, as a little child hopes for everything from its parents."¹⁸ Theresa of the Child Jesus knew how to individualize and interiorize the message of Scripture. She discovered that the voice of God directed itself personally to her. Thus was born her doctrine of the "spiritual childhood;" she was the first to live it, and it has done and continues to do a world of good in the Church.

Reading God, Garcia M. Colombas, pp.3 5-39

24 Francis De Sales, Bishop. Memorial.
25 Conversion of St. Paul, Apostle, Feast.
27 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk III)
28 St. Thomas Aquinas (Memorial)
31 John Bosco, Priest. Memorial

2 Presentation of the Lord. Feast

3 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk IV)

5 Agatha, Virgin, Martyr. Memorial

6 Paul Miki, Martyr, and his Companions, Martyrs. Memorial

10 5th Sunday in Ordinary Time. (Wk I)

14 Cyril, Monk, and Methodius, Bishop. Memorial.

17 6th Sunday in Ordinary Time. (Wk II)

21 Peter Damian, Bishop. Memorial.

22 Chair of Peter, Apostle. Feast.

23 Polycarp, Bishop, Martyr. Memorial.

24 7th Sunday on Ordinary Time (Wk III)

25 Walburga, Abbess, Secondary Patron of Belmont Abbey. Memorial.

NECROLOGY



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

JANUARY

3 Fr. Gerard Rettger
 4 Fr. Herman Grones
 5 Fr. Benedict Rettger
 7 Fr. Paul Milde
 8 Br. Benedict Marshall
 9 Fr. Anselm Biggs
 14 Fr. Maurus Buchheit
 15 Fr. Matthew Graz
 22 Br. Felix Keilhacker
 24 Br. Obl. Fredrick Schleid
 28 Br. Philip Lobinger
 29 Br. Aloysius Buss

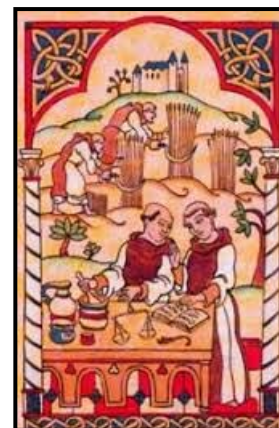
FEBRUARY

3 Br. Eugene O'Neil
 8 Fr. Kenneth Geyer
 18 Fr. William Regnat
 24 Br. Aegidius Seier
 24 Br. Gregory Corcoran
 25 Fr. Melchior Reichert
 28 Br. George Poellath

NEXT MEETING: MONASTIC PRACTICES — WORK

We will continue our discussion of *Monastic Practices* by Charles Cummings, OCSO Questions to ponder while you read:

- In what ways are work and creation related?
- What role does work play in the spiritual journey?
- How is work a significant part of Benedictine life in particular?
- From a Christian perspective, is work a curse or a blessing?
- How does a Benedictine perspective of work compare to other perceptions of work more prevalent in modern society?
- Does the monastic tradition of manual labor continue to be viable in a high tech society?



WISDOM OF THE DESERT FATHERS

Make creels of reeds or weave baskets out of pliant osiers. Hoe your ground; mark out your garden into even plots; and when you have sown your cabbages or set your plants convey water to them in conduits; . . . Graft unfruitful stocks with buds and slips that you may shortly be rewarded for your toil by plucking sweet apples from them. Construct also hives for bees, for to these the proverbs of Solomon send you, "and you may learn from the tiny creatures how to order a monastery and to discipline a kingdom. Twist lines too for catching fish, and copy books; that your hand may earn your food and your mind may be satisfied with reading. For "every one that is idle is a prey to vain desires." In Egypt the monasteries make it a rule to receive none who are not willing to work; for they regard labour as necessary not only for the support of the body but also for the salvation of the soul.

St. Jerome, *Letter to Rusticus*,



It is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor . George Washington

"It is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God, and to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon, and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in Holy Scripture, and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord. " Abraham Lincoln

FEBRUARY 14: STS. CYRIL AND METHODIUS

On Feb. 14, the universal Church honors two brothers, Sts. Cyril and Methodius, who are called the “Apostles of the Slavs” for their tireless work in spreading the Gospel throughout Eastern Europe in the ninth century.

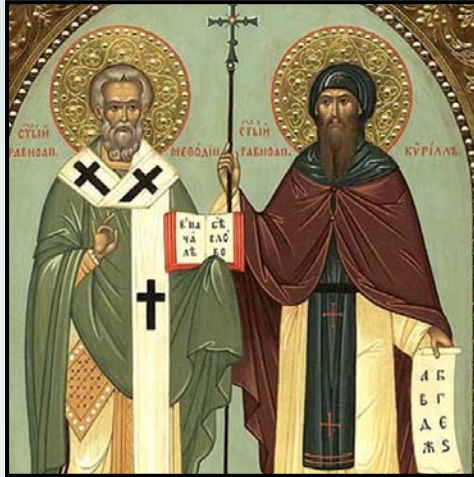
Such was their influence in Church history, through their evangelization efforts, that the late Pope John Paul II named the two brothers the patron saints of Europe along with fifth century monastic leader St. Benedict.

Born into a prestigious senatorial family in Thessalonica, in 827 and 826 respectively, Sts. Cyril and Methodius renounced their wealth and status. They chose instead to become priests.

Both were living in a monastery on the Bosphorus – now known as the Istanbul strait which separates Europe and Asia – when the authorities from the Khazar Empire sent to Constantinople for a Christian missionary. Cyril was chosen and was accompanied by his brother. Both learned the Khazar language and converted many of the people.

Soon after the Khazar mission, there was a request from officials in Moravia – a region in the present-day Czech Republic – for missionaries who could preach and celebrate liturgical services in the local dialect. Although German missionaries had already labored among the people for some time, they had little success.

In order to fulfill this mission, Cyril and Methodius took the step of adapting the Greek alphabet into a script for the Slavonic language. The result was the “Cyrillic” alphabet, which was first used to translate the Bible and liturgical books. It also became the primary means of written communication for large portions of the world, including modern day Russia.



The two labored in Moravia for four years until 868, achieving greater success than the German missionaries. Their Byzantine origins and use of the vernacular language caused some German church officials to regard them with suspicion. However, after being summoned to Rome they met with Pope Adrian II who warmly approved of their methods.

Cyril and Methodius were commended by the pope for

their missionary activity and ordained bishops. Yet Cyril would not return to Moravia, and died in Rome in 869.

In order to further Methodius' work in Moravia, Pope Adrian II appointed him archbishop of a new archdiocese in the territory, independent from the German church. Unfortunately this had the effect of angering his German critics, who had him deposed and imprisoned for a period of three years.

Pope Adrian's successor, John VIII, managed to have Methodius freed and had him reinstated as archbishop, after which he expanded his work to incorporate the region of modern day Poland. The new Pope continued to support Methodius' use of the Slavic languages in worship and his translations of the Bible, despite continuing controversy with some elements of the German church.

Eventually, with the assistance of several Greek priests, he translated the whole Bible into the language that is known today as Church Slavonic. He chose his successor from among the native Moravian Slavs whom he had evangelized, and died on April 6 in 885.

Sts. Cyril and Methodius' missionary work among the Slavs laid the essential foundation for the later Christianization of Ukraine and Russia in 988, when the Russian Prince Vladimir accepted Baptism.

**The March meeting of the Oblates will be on the 17th at 2:30
unless otherwise announced.**