



# Oblates of St. Benedict

*Oblate Program at Belmont Abbey, NC July-August, 2019*

## BR. LEO MAKES HIS SIMPLE PROFESSION

Br. Leo (Sean) Young professed simple vows (for three years) and received the monastic hood at the Mass for the Feast of St. Benedict, Patriarch of Western Monasticism on July 11, 2019. Present for the profession and celebration were the members of the monastic community, priests of the Diocese of Charlotte, members of the College community, as well as family and friends of Br. Leo.



Br. Leo and Abbot Placid: exchange of Peace.  
Photo credit; Catholic News Herald

Br. Leo is now a junior monk in our community and will begin to take on additional duties and responsibilities in the monastery and in the College. He is currently receiving training in playing the organ, and is likely to begin working with the monastic schola and with the music for the Student Mass in the College. The three years of juniorate continue to be a time of discernment for Br. Leo, as through prayer, he seeks to determine if God is calling him to this way of life.

Br. Leo is an alumnus of Belmont Abbey College, graduating in 2013 with a degree in English. He is originally from Winston-Salem, North Carolina. We are happy to congratulate him on reaching this step in his discernment of religious life!

Fr. Elias Correa-Torres, OSB

## READING PRECISE AND SPIRITUAL

Peter the Great, Czar of All the Russians, issued this decree: "Monastics must not only read the Sacred Scriptures, but also understand them." It is obvious that the reading of the Bible serves no purpose if it is not understood. The Church has never considered the reading of the Word as a magical rite.

Some pages of the Bible are clear; others, obscure. Taken as a whole, Scripture turns out to be more obscure than clear. Many times it is not easy to understand perfectly what it wants to say. The transmission of the text has been often defective. The Hebrew language, like every tongue, has undergone evolution in the course of the ages. The manner in which authors so remote and personal, like St. Paul, expressed themselves differs much from ours ... To discover the precise meaning of certain words, certain passages, not only in the Old Testament but in the New as well, presupposes effort and study.

This effort and study cannot be avoided by the reader of Scripture, as the scholars of *lectio divina* point out. Naturally, this does not mean that every reader of the Bible must be a consummate scholar of exegesis, but it means we must utilize the works of the scholars of exegesis. Call to mind the exertions of an Origen, St. Jerome, in order to obtain the correct text of Scripture and to penetrate its true meaning — above all its literal sense, which "divine reading" must settle. Nothing may remain unclear, vague, imprecise — as far as that is possible. Philology, the natural sciences, the whole of human knowledge must be conscripted to discover the historical meaning of the written word of God.

Still, all of this is only the point of departure for the believer who reads the Scripture with the view of being impregnated with "that truth which God, for our salvation, caused to be consigned to the Scriptures."

"Divine reading" is a spiritual, not a scientific, reading. Seek in Scripture - and in the texts of Christian tradition that explain and complete it — its significance for the spiritual life, for each one's life. *Lectio* is directed towards practice, and its purpose is to illuminate, nourish and build up piety. And if it supposes or presupposes precise knowledge of the literal sense — only in this way can the reader avoid fantasies and deplorable deviations — all of Christian tradition invites, animates and en-

## NECROLOGY

### JULY

- 3 Fr. Maurice McDonnell (1950)
- 4 Br. Lawrence Bittel (1946)
- 6 Br. Francis Buss (1944)
- 10 Fr. Bede Lightner (2002)
- 17 Fr. Obl. Bertrand Pattison (1992)
- 20 Fr. Stephen Dowd (1985)
- 22 Br. Philip Berhard (1907)
- 22 Br. Vincent Melber (1946)
- 23 Fr. Raphael Arthur (1941)
- 24 Abbot Leo Haid (1924)
- 26 Fr. Raymond Geyer (2009)
- 27 Br. Obl. Jude Morris (1951)

### AUGUST

- 3 Fr. Nicholas Gibilisco (1994)
- 5 Br. Fidelis Kuhn (1916)
- 6 Fr. Ignatius Remke (1944)
- 12 Br. Rupert Sebald (1953)
- 13 Br. Leodegar Ochsenkuehn (1973)
- 14 Fr. Martin Hayes (1992)
- 19 Br. Meinrad Buechling (1894)
- 31 Fr. Brendan Dooley (1964)



## ORDO

### JULY

- 3 Thomas, Apostle. Feast
- 7 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk II)
- 11 **Benedict, Patriarch of Western Monasticism. Feast**
- 14 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk III)
- 15 St. Bonaventure, Bishop, Doctor of the Church
- 16 Our Lady of Mt. Carmel (opt. Mem.)
- 21 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk IV)
- 23 St. Mary Magdalene, Feast
- 25 James, Apostle, Feast
- 26 Joachim and Anne, Memorial
- 28 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk I)
- 29 Martha, Mary and Lazarus
- 31 Ignatius of Loyola, Memorial

### AUGUST

- 1 Alphonsus Liguori, Memorial
- 4 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk II)
- 6 Transfiguration of the Lord. Feast
- 8 Dominic, Priest. Memorial
- 10 Lawrence, Martyr. Feast
- 11 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk III)
- 14 Maximilian Kolbe, Memorial
- 15 **Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Solemnity**
- 18 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk IV)
- 20 Bernard, Abbot. Memorial
- 21 Pius X, Memorial
- 22 Queenship of the Virgin Mary. Memorial.
- 24 Bartholomew, Apostle, Feast
- 25 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk I)
- 27 Monica, Holy Woman, Memorial
- 28 Augustine, Bishop. Memorial
- 29 Passion of John the Baptist. Memorial



courages the believing reader to investigate the spiritual sense lovingly. Instead of stopping at the events, the material images, one must set out from them in order to lift the mind to the ideas and realities which they call forth or symbolize.

This holds true above all of the Old Testament, which received its fulfillment only in the revelation of the New. Thus the texts of the two continue to alternate and to respond to one another. "Before Jesus Christ the Old Testament was water; now it is wine," Origen of Alexandria taught. Regarding St. Augustine, F. van der Meer has written that the young master of eloquence began to feel "a certain reverence" towards the Bible in Milan when he heard the allegorical explanations of St. Ambrose. "Suddenly those carnal and barbarous stories appeared full of spirit, capable of much higher meaning. This was a decisive moment in his life ... since until his

death he was persuaded of the reality of that spiritual sense. There was question much more of well founded belief than of demonstrated truth. Augustine could appeal to the example of the Lord himself and that of the apostles Peter and Paul, who cited texts of the Old Testament in confirmation of the New .... Similarly he could refer to secular tradition already of the liturgy, catechesis and theology. "

The scholars of Christian spirituality, especially the Ancients, can and must initiate us into this spiritual reading of the Bible. However, all the books in the world are incapable of forming us in that savory knowledge, unless on our part we show total generosity. Cassian underscored this energetically. If we do not surrender ourselves soul and body to the Word of God, then it will never fully surrender itself to us. Sacred Scripture contains a special grace: its words, besides their literal sense, possess a profound spiritual resonance, which a person can discover only thanks to certain connaturality. The more we have progressed in the labor of purification from our vices and sins and in the acquisition of Christian virtue, the more will we perceive that deep and hidden meaning. Only spiritual people can taste the spiritual sense.

St. Gregory the Great observes, on his part, that if the Bible is part easy and part difficult, this comes from the fact that it was written for all, both the strong and the weak. It exercises the former by its obscurities and shows itself indulgent to the latter, thanks to its simplicity. The Bible comes within reach of every reader. "If you seek something elevated in the words of God, those holy

words lift themselves with you and with you ascend to the heights. Like the manna in the desert, Scripture adapts itself to the taste of everyone. It is suitable for all and, while remaining faithful to itself, descends to the capabilities of those who use it. "

Garcia M. Colombas  
*Reading God*, pp. 52-55

## THE PSALMS

We go through the Psalms in a two-week cycle at Holy Spirit Monastery when we chant the Divine Office. There are many people from both the Jewish and Christian traditions that are devoted to these prayers. I read a story about an old Jewish woman who spent her days reading from the book of Psalms, it was her 'prayer'. In doing that I am sure something very deep was going on in her soul and most likely she attained a high degree of prayer/union with God. Like many Christians in their later years who spend their time saying the Rosary over and over again, allowing their hearts to open up to the Infinite Lover of their souls. Those who pray the Psalms or say the Rosary, are in reality praying for all.

The Psalms are not always easy to say since they deal with what I believe is the collective prayer of humanity towards God. Some are deeply moving, Psalm 139 comes to mind: "O Lord you have probed me and you know me, you know when I sit and when I stand"; is the beginning of a deeply poignant prayer, one of trust and abandonment to God. Then some, like Psalm 22 is different: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me", starts off expressing more than just physical suffering but one of feeling abandoned and bereft of all comfort. It does end however in hope and trust.

In our Divine Office, we omit some of the stronger cursing psalms. Which I think is appropriate when using them in a public setting on a regular basis, they are harder to understand, feel and digest. In private, however, I think it is good to mull over the more uncomfortable psalms since they get us in touch with some of our deeper and darker expressions of our hearts. Anger, rage, hatred and the desire for revenge need to be dealt with and not just repressed. What better way to express these emotions than in prayer. In doing so we unite ourselves to all who suffer in such a manner the world over...all we need do is to turn on the TV or read the newspaper. The news is filled with people overflowing with anguish, pain, sorrow, and rage....as well as the desire for justice often covered over by the desire for revenge.

The Psalms are an honest expression, not much sugary pious sentiment in any of them. Many of the Psalms wrestle with God in an honest childlike manner. As Christians, it is good to know what is in our hearts. Prayer allows us to express that before God, to let it go, and if needed to express, scream or mutter what we are experiencing. It is when we learn to embrace our humanity, to love it, that we can do something about the inner chaos that seeks to control us if we do not deal

with it in a manner that leads to some sort of expression. Prayer is the expression, the creative process, the art, in which we deal with the energy within, the fire and ice, the deserts and oceans of our inner lives.

So try to pray the Psalms, stop at a verse if need be, there is no rush, place yourself in the mood of the Psalm and if it fits your inner ocean, so much the better. It takes trust to be open and honest before the Lord. It is all seen anyway, hiding an illusion, though a powerful one that we can hide from the loving gaze of our Father. To pray the psalms by oneself in a slow manner, can lead to a sort of life review, an examination of conscience that can show the way to deep healing on many levels.



"The Lord is my shepherd (Ps 23), what a verse to contemplate, as well this one: "Happy the man who takes your child from its mother's womb and dashed it upon a stone". Now that is not comfortable, but it does express a deep desire to strike back, to hurt, so what better way to express it than in prayer before a God who demands that we

love our enemies, our neighbors as ourselves. The path of prayer is not one of comfort or consolation though that is an aspect of it, but is one of inner confrontation, wrestling with God and in the end, having a heart wounded but on the road to healing....that is grace's gift to all of us.

In prayer, we are one with all of humanity, though it takes time to come to that understanding. In the Psalms, we learn of our common struggles, our joys, and fear of death. When we pray, we clasp the hands of all who have gone before, hold on to those who will come after and in our hearts, embrace all who are with us today on pilgrimage.

We can pray for those we hate, for those we want to hurt, for our loved ones, for all without distinction. For our connection is far deeper than our emotions and feelings, it is what we are rooted in.....go deep enough and we find that it is Christ Jesus that we are all rooted in. The Risen Lord, who prayed Psalm 22 while dying on the cross, journeys with each one of us, perhaps reciting that Psalm with us when we are going through times of inner turmoil, anger and the struggle with hatred and the desire for revenge.....yet wanting to do the opposite. Our desires tell us a great deal about ourselves, so the desire to forgive, even if we struggle mightily with it, is a sign that we are on the way. To be gentle with ourselves, to not be shocked by what is within, leads to compassion and deep empathy for all....for we know ourselves.

Br. Mark Dohle, OCSO  
Holy Spirit Monastery



## THE BENEDICTINE CONGREGATIONS

... What, practically speaking, is a Benedictine congregation? How do the different congregations relate to one another? How does St. Andrew's Abbey relate to the other monasteries of the Congregation of the Annunciation?

Prepare yourself for a shock: from the perspective of canon law there is no such thing as "The Benedictine Order." Are you surprised? You should be. After all, everyone knows that O.S.B., the letters which Benedictine monastics (sisters, nuns and monks) sign after their names stand for Ordo Sancti Benedicti - the Order of St. Benedict. However, there is no Benedictine "Order." There were Benedictine monks and nuns long before anyone spoke of religious orders: in fact, for several centuries, Benedictine monasticism was the only form of religious life in the Western Church. Benedictines are thus much older than the concept of a religious order.

The term "religious order" usually implies an international structure in which common observance is maintained through submission to a single authority figure, usually a "superior general." Benedictines have never had such a structure. That is, there has never been a single abbot who could claim jurisdiction over all Benedictine monasteries. Only the Holy Father in Rome can claim that privilege. Benedictine abbeys are fiercely independent. They are required to be financially independent both of their congregations and of the diocese in which they live. They must be capable of "making it on their own." Therefore, instead of an order, Benedictines are united in a "Confederation of Congregations." Each of the unique Benedictine congregations has its own constitutions, its own abbot president, and its own approach to living out the Rule of St. Benedict. Each of the Benedictine congregations functions in a real sense a unique "order."

The different Benedictine congregations are very loosely linked to one another through the Benedictine Confederation, presided over by the Benedictine Abbot Primate, who is elected by the Benedictine abbots of the world for an eight-year term. However, the Abbot Primate is not the head of a religious order. He has no jurisdiction over the abbot presidents of the congregations, and thus no jurisdiction over individual abbeys, (except for a small and rapidly-decreasing number of communities which have not yet joined congregations). His role is largely is to facilitate communication between individual Benedictine communities and between the Benedictine congrega-

tions. In a very real sense part of his responsibility is to safeguard the autonomy and the unique gifts possessed by the different Benedictine congregations and the abbeys which comprise them. The role of the Abbot Primate is to promote harmony while protecting legitimate diversity.

Each of the different Benedictine congregations enjoys the same autonomy, the same right to self-government as a religious order. Each of the "branches" on the Benedictine family

tree is thus self-governing and self-sufficient. Each congregation respects the others; but each represents a different facet of the many-faceted jewel which is Benedictine monasticism. For example, the abbeys of the English Benedictine Congregation often run high schools and parishes. English Benedictines thus tend to emphasize the importance of monastic priesthood, and understand monasticism as completely compatible with teaching high school and serving as a parish priest. Benedictine monks of the Solesmes (French) and Beuronese (German) congregations, by contrast, do not usually teach in schools

or serve as parish priests. They try to undertake work which does not require leaving the cloister. The monks of the international St. Ottilien Congregation are missionaries. The abbeys of the American Cassinese (of which Belmont Abbey is a member) and Swiss American Benedictine Congregations often run seminaries and universities.

Within the Benedictine Confederation there is thus great diversity in regard to the details of living out the Rule of St. Benedict. There are obvious differences between monasteries and between congregations with regard to certain external elements of monastic life. For example, most Benedictines wear the traditional black habit. However, in some monasteries the traditional habit is worn only in choir or on Sundays; in other abbeys it is never worn. But what Benedictines have in common is more important than the things which distinguish them. The different congregations all have in common the Rule of St. Benedict and a large body of monastic practice and custom. Especially important to all Benedictines is the emphasis found in every monastery on the liturgy celebrated in common, on lectio divina (contemplative, prayerful reading of the Scriptures) and on hospitality.

Fr. Luke Dysinger, OSB

<http://ldysinger.stjohnsem.edu/@homepage/int-cong.html>

