



Oblates of St. Benedict

Oblate Program at Belmont Abbey, NC July-August, 2021

ON-LINE MEETINGS

Oblates and Novice-Oblates who have completed the formation program: Meetings are third Sunday of each month at 3:00 PM. Subject, Chapter 3, for July 18 is carried forward from June.

Inquirers and Novice-Oblates: Meetings are usually the fourth Wednesday of each month at 7:00 PM. Next Meeting is July 28 and the subject, Prayer, is carried forward from June

None of the meetings are exclusive to either group and are, of course, open to everyone. But ZOOM requires an invitation to be sent so, if you wish to attend, and you have not already sent your information, please contact George at gkcobb0321@pm.me



RESTORATION OF HOLY READING

We are wont to speak of what we do not have, what we desire to have, what we already possess, but seek to possess more fully, with greater authenticity. "From the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks." The fact that for some years much has been said and written about *lectio divina*, as we saw summarily at the beginning of these pages, shows that in the hearts of today's monastics there is a desire to restore a fully Christian and eminently monastic practice. In the course of time it has been neglected, forgotten or, in most instances, devalued and obscured.

Today we are aware that *lectio divina* indisputably constitutes an essential element of Benedictine monastic life. If we strive to arrive at what we are, to recover our identity, it is necessary that it once again occupy in our scale of values and in our daily horarium the place of

honor that is its due. The *Covenant of Peace* of the Swiss-American Congregation of Benedictines, already referred to, declares without hesitation: *lectio divina* "is essential to the Benedictine life" and "only its re-establishment will bring about the experience of a more meaningful Benedictine life" both for the monastics themselves and for "their contemporaries."

How can that restoration be brought about? Enough has been written and discussed about it. With the help of some of those contributions we shall broach a subject so urgent and actual.

The Concept of Lectio Divina

Above all, I believe that it is necessary to maintain firmly the restricted concept of "divine reading" which modern studies of spirituality have allowed us to recover. Today we know what it was for the early and medieval monastics, and it would be an error with regrettable consequences to seek to modify that concept by intellectualizing it, restricting it to monastics or by converting *lectio* into study or by enlarging it in such a manner that it would lose its true nature.

Today we know perfectly well that *lectio divina* in the original and authentic sense of the expression is "spiritual reading," but not any kind of "spiritual reading," a simple, edifying and pious reading. It is, essentially, a specific form of reading the Word of God contained in the Scriptures and only concomitantly and in subsidiary manner the writings of the Fathers and other texts of the Christian tradition. It is, above all, a daily, personal, intimate contact with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, a contact with Jesus Christ, our Lord and Brother, which takes place in Holy Scripture. As its name indicates, it is "reading God." A reading with faith — God speaks, God speaks to me here and now — and with great attention; a slow, meditative, savored reading; a reading that seeks primarily the literal and precise meaning of the text in order then to seek and discover what the Spirit of God deigns to manifest to the readers; a reading so active that it engages the entire person; yet at the same time, it is passive, that is to say, a reading in which we (the readers) permit ourselves to be influenced by the Word of God who speaks to us personally, who speaks intimately bean to bean; a reading made in the bosom of the Church, the body of Christ, "with the loving eyes of a spouse," and "with the eyes of the Spouse"; an assiduous reading made every day without



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JULY

- 3 Thomas, Apostle. Feast
- 5 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk II)
- 11 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk III)
- 15 Bonaventure, Bishop, Doctor of the Church
- 16 Our Lady of Mt. Carmel (opt. Mem.)
- 18 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk IV)
- 22 Mary Magdalene, Feast
- 25 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk I)
- 26 Joachim and Anne, Parents of the Virgin
Mary, Memorial
- 29 Martha, Mary and Lazarus, Memorial
- 31 Ignatius of Loyola, Memorial

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

- 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 Bernhard (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)

exception; disinterested reading — to read for the sake of reading and not for having read, reading in which we seek nothing else than the reading itself. *Lectio divina* is "to open the Bible and to meet God, to learn to know the heart of God," to hear and to respond to God in the sublime dialogue which we call contemplative prayer. *Lectio*, says Father Lassus, is "an occupation that borders on the quality the dignity and the efficacy of a sacrament. The seeker for God, the disciple of the Word, goes to a rendezvous, an encounter. We try to get into contact with the One who seeks us much more than we are sought by God. And I imagine that listening to the Word will produce colloquy, prayer, that is, discourse of faith, of admiration, of adoration or jubilation, of thanksgiving or of tears — a discourse that simplifies itself more and more until it turns into contemplation, a kind of fascination, of enchantment . . ." It is supremely important that we, like the Ancients in the faith, should consider the Bible not as book "to read," but much more as a Tabernacle, like the Tent of Meeting of which Chapter 33 of the Book of Exodus speaks: "The tent, which was called the Tent of Meeting, Moses used to pitch at some distance away. Anyone who wished to consult the Lord would go to this Tent of Meeting outside the camp ... As Moses entered the tent, the column of cloud would come down and stand at its entrance while the Lord spoke with Moses ... The Lord used to speak with Moses face to face, as a friend speaks with a friend."

What Books Are to Be Read

Scripture — and this must be energetically stressed — is the proper object of *lectio divina*. We know from history that initially only the Bible and its Patristic commentaries were read; the latter were considered as part of the Bible, and there is no doubt that this was the reason *lectio* took its specific form and also its name. What other book could aspire to have the reading of it called "divine reading." Later other Christian authors began to be read. Now Dom Ambrose Southey asks himself whether we ought to return to the reading of the Bible alone. "My own answer to this," he replies, "is both 'yes' and 'no'! Scripture should be regarded as the primary subject matter of *lectio* but other books should not be excluded, provided that we see them as helping us in some way (even indirectly) to understand the Word of God. It needs to be added, however, that not all books lend themselves to the slow meditative method recommended above."

Patently, not every work, not every author is suitable for "divine reading." In order to know what may be read and what ought not to be read in *lectio divina*, the *Rule of St. Benedict* offers us a precious criterion: only the works of the "holy Catholic Writers" ought to be read. Today we may apply that expression to all the authors who, in whatever age, have begotten Christian teaching, causing it to grow from the seed contained in the sacred books.



St. Jerome and St. Eustochium by
Francisco de Zurbarán

Another valid criterion is the following: the book to be read should be apt to arouse and maintain prayer, or better, it must move this particular reader to pray, since it may happen that what leaves one person indifferent and cold will perhaps touch the heart and elevate the soul of another to God. Sensibilities are so diverse. We may never forget that *lectio divina* is both reading and prayer. When St. Jerome wrote to St. Eustochium, "When you pray, you speak to your Spouse; when you read, the Spouse speaks to you," he did not want to indicate she ought first to end reading in order then to devote herself to prayer. Reading and prayer, as we have seen, for the early Christians were two spiritual activities which were united and had to be united in *lectio divina*. And it is perfectly clear that the Christians of antiquity and the Middle Ages know no other method of prayer than "divine reading;" they prayed habitually by keeping the sacred text before their eyes or at least in their memory.

From *Reading God* by Garcia M. Colombas, pp. 117-122 (Used with permission)



THE ASSUMPTION OF MARY (AUGUST 15)

For Mary, much more than for St. Paul, to live was Christ, but to die was gain (Phil. 1:21). When death overtook her, her thoughts were on Christ, as they always were. She owed no debt to death, for she had been conceived without sin. She had been exempted from bearing the guilt of Adam, and might have been exempted altogether from the experience of death. But because her Son passed through death in order to win salvation for us, he wanted to share this final experience of our humanity, and, in her own way and degree, to lay down her life for His friends. Nowhere more than in His death did Christ come close to us, and His Mother too seems closer to us for having submitted to the condition of our mortality.

We have no details about her death. No doubt St. John and his mother were at her side. It is likely that she was buried after a short interval. The earliest and most reliable tradition asserts that she died at Jerusalem, in or near the upper chamber where Jesus celebrated the Last Supper. Over this site the Benedictines have built a church and monastery called the Dormition or Falling Asleep of our Lady.

In Mary's case, as in the case of our Lord, death proved weak; it was as powerless to hold her as it had been powerless to hold Him. For a short period, perhaps about as long as Jesus, she remained in a state of death. No mortal eye witnessed the wonderful reunion which took place between her beatified soul and her glorified body. Perhaps for a time no one on earth suspected the victory of life. But very early it was believed that her body had been glorified and translated to heaven. Stories were circulated about this event, stories which served to illustrate the faith of the Church in her Assumption which was soon expressed in the great feast celebrated on August 15. The solemn act of the (late) Holy Father, Pope Pius XII, at the end of the Jubilee of 1950, by which he infallibly defined that the Blessed Mother of God was elevated to heaven in body and soul, only added solemnity to what was already believed and taught in the whole Church. Since 1950 it is simply more clear that no one can be a Catholic if they refuse to believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has already transformed her lowly body and made it like His glorious body, in virtue of the energy by which He is able to subject all things to Himself (see Phil. 3:21). . . .

Our Mother's Assumption brings before us the thought of the final destiny of her children. We are not meant to enjoy the Beatific Vision merely as separated souls. One day we too are to live before God in body as well as soul, in a body spiritualized and glorified by the power which flows to it from the soul's vision of God as He is in Him-self. The Holy Father, in defining the Assumption of our Lady, wanted us to honor her anticipated resurrection. But he also wanted to revive our faith in the resurrection of our own bodies, for this belief is a great trial to the reason of the natural man and is therefore a precious test of the seriousness of our acceptance of the revealed word of God which so clearly teaches it.

Charles J. Callan, OP and John F. McConnell, MM
from *Spiritual Riches of the Rosary Mysteries*



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AUGUST

1 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk II)

4 John Vianney, Priest, Memorial

6 Transfiguration of the Lord. Feast

8 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk III)

10 Lawrence, Martyr. Feast

11 Clare, Virgin, Memorial

14 Maximilian Kolbe, Martyr, Memorial

15 Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Solemnity (Wk IV)

20 Bernard, Abbot. Memorial

21 Pius X, Memorial

22 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk I)

24 Bartholomew, Apostle, Feast

27 Monica, Married Woman, Memorial

28 Augustine, Bishop. Memorial

29 21st Sunday in Ordinary Time (Wk I)

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

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)

THE FEAST DAY OF MARTHA, MARY AND LAZARUS (JULY 29) ADDED TO THE ROMAN CALENDAR

Editor's Note: *This feast day has been celebrated by the American-Cassinese Congregation, OSB. On January 26, 2021 Pope Francis added the feast day to the Universal Calendar of the Roman Catholic Church.*



“...we continue reading the 10 chapters of the Evangelist Luke. The passage today is that on Martha and Mary. Who are these two women? Martha and Mary, sisters of Lazarus, are the relatives and faithful disciples of the Lord, who lived in Bethany. St Luke describes them in this way: Mary, at the feet of Jesus, “listened to his teaching”, while Martha was burdened with much serving (cf. Lk 10:39-40). Both welcome the Lord on his brief visit, but they do so differently. Mary sets herself at the feet of Jesus to listen but Martha lets herself become absorbed in preparing everything, and so much so that she says to Jesus: “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me” (v. 40). And Jesus answers scolding her sweetly: “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing” (v. 41).

What does Jesus mean? What is this one thing that we need? First of all, it is important to understand that this is not about two contradictory attitudes: listening to the word of the Lord, contemplation, and practical service to our neighbour. These are not two attitudes opposed to one another, but, on the contrary, they are two essential aspects in our Christian life; aspects that can never be separated, but are lived out in profound unity and harmony.

Why then was Martha scolded, even if kindly, by Jesus? Because she considered only what she was doing to be essential; she was too absorbed and worried by the things “to do”. For a Christian, works of service and charity are never detached from the principle of all our action: that is, listening to the Word of the Lord, to be — like Mary — at the feet of Jesus, with the attitude of a disciple. And that is why Martha was scolded.

In our Christian life too, dear brothers and sisters, may prayer and action always be deeply united. A prayer that does not lead you to practical action for your brother — the poor, the sick, those in need of help, a brother in difficulty — is a sterile and incomplete prayer. But, in the same way, when ecclesial service is attentive only to doing, things gain in importance, functions, structures, and we forget the centrality of Christ. When time is not set aside for dialogue with him in prayer, we risk serving ourselves and not God present in our needy brother and sister. St Benedict sums up the kind of life that indicated for his monks in two words: ora et labora, pray and work. It is from contemplation, from a strong friendship with the Lord that the capacity is born in us to live and to bring the love of God, his mercy, his tenderness, to others. And also our work with brothers in need, our charitable works of mercy, lead us to the Lord, because it is in the needy brother and sister that we see the Lord himself.

Let us ask the Virgin Mary, the Mother of listening and of service, to teach us to meditate in our hearts on the Word of her Son, to pray faithfully, to be ever more attentive in practical ways to the needs of our brothers and sisters.

Collect for the Feast of Martha, Mary and Lazarus (July 29)

Grant, we pray, almighty God, that the example of your Saints may spur us on to a better life, so that we, who celebrate the memory of Saints Martha, Mary and Lazarus, may also imitate without ceasing their deeds. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.