

# Oblate Formation Westminster Abbey

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## Lessons 1-12



Westminster  
Abbey

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# Lesson 1: On Holiness & Pursuing Benedictine Spirituality

## 1. PRAYER

(This section provides the prayer that is prayed every night at the beginning of Vigils in our monastery along with Old and New Testament passages. There are more passages at the end of this document. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

*Come, O Holy Spirit, replenish the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your divine love.*

*Excite, O Lord, in your Church, the Spirit which our Most Holy Father, St. Benedict served; that filled with the same, we may study to love what he loved and practice what he taught. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### 1.1 Old Testament Scripture

“For I, the LORD, am your God. You shall make and keep yourselves holy, because I am holy. You shall not make yourselves unclean, then, by any swarming creature that crawls on the ground. Since I, the LORD, am the one who brought you up from the land of Egypt that I might be your God, you shall be holy, because I am holy” (Lv 11:44-45).

### 1.2 New Testament Scripture

“I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship” (Rom 12:1).

### 1.3 The Rule of St. Benedict

*(These verses contain the Lord’s call to the workman in a multitude of people, calling him to his kingdom.)*

Seeking his workman in a multitude of people, the Lord calls out to him and lifts his voice again: 15 Is there anyone here who yearns for life and desires to see good days? (Ps 33[34]:13). 16 If you hear this and your answer is “I do,” God then directs these words to you: 17 If you desire true and eternal life, keep your tongue free from vicious talk and your lips from all deceit; turn away from evil and do good; let peace be your quest and aim (Ps 33[34]:14-15). 18 Once you have done this, my eyes will be upon you and my ears will listen for your prayers; and even before you ask me, I will say to you: Here I am (Isa

58:9). 19 What, dear brothers, is more delightful than this voice of the Lord calling to us? 20 See how the Lord in his love shows us the way of life. 21 Clothed then with faith and the performance of good works, let us set out on this way, with the Gospel for our guide, that we may deserve to see him who has called us to his kingdom (1 Thess 2:12). (RB Prol: 14-21)

*May Saint Benedict, filled with the spirit of the just, intercede for all who follow his rule.*  
(Antiphon, Feast of St. Benedict)

## **2. READINGS**

*We are called to holiness in our everyday lives.*

### **2.1 Reasons for Deciding to Follow Benedictine Spirituality**

Why should one choose to become an Oblate of St. Benedict? Life is busy enough! Why add more? The real answer lies below the surface: we are seeking meaning in life. In the book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl, an Austrian neurologist, psychologist, and Holocaust survivor, wrote that "striving to find meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man." Questions about meaning in life are spiritual questions. Our deepest desire is to find meaning in life, to live a life that matters, to be holy. However, sometimes we may be unaware that holiness is what we are seeking. The pursuit of pleasure, power, or fame may be a disguised form of our fundamental quest for meaning.

"Holiness" is a word that tends to frighten us. "Me, holy? Well hardly!" But that is not the way that the Bible speaks of holiness. St. Paul states in no uncertain terms that we are called to be holy, called to be saints (2 Tim 1:9). This is the reason why God sent us His only Son, Jesus Christ, as our source of mercy and healing. The Catholic Church teaches that "God, infinitely perfect and blessed in Himself, in a plan of sheer goodness, freely created man to make him share in His own blessed life. For this reason, at every time and in every place, God draws close to man. He calls man to seek Him, to know Him, to love Him with all his strength" (CCC , #1). This call leads us to seek to live a holy life: knowing, loving and serving God as best we can, with all the strengths and weaknesses that He has given us, and being happy with Him forever. What we need to remember, to lean on, is the fact that God wants us to be holy. He keeps on calling us to holiness, and He stands ready to help us. He gives Himself to us, and He waits for our response.

### **2.2 Lumen Gentium, the Vatican II Document on the Church (34, 39, 40, 41)**

One of the great documents that came from the Second Vatican Council was the document on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*. This document makes no bones about holiness. It states: “Therefore in the Church, everyone whether belonging to the hierarchy, or being cared for by it, is called to holiness, according to the saying of the Apostle: ‘For this is the will of God, your sanctification’ (1 Thes 4:3)” (39). It continues: “The Lord Jesus, the divine Teacher and Model of all perfection, preached holiness of life to each and every one of His disciples” (40). “The followers of Christ are called by God, not according to their accomplishments, but according to His own purpose and grace. They are justified in the Lord Jesus, because in the baptism of faith they truly become sons of God and sharers in the divine nature. In this way they are really made holy. Then too, by God's gift, they must hold on to and complete in their lives this holiness they have received” (40).

“Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society. In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history” (40). “The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one - that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in His glory. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity” (41).

*Lumen Gentium* does its best to make very clear to us that the Church is urgently called to be holy. We, as members of the Body of Christ, are justified in Jesus and through Baptism become children of God. We become sharers of the divine nature, in the sense that God is entirely for others. Our holiness is cultivated by accepting life conditions, duties, and situations as coming from God, and by cooperating with the divine will and showing to others the love with which God loves the world. We attain holiness by following the way that God has chosen for us. Vocation determines our way, with no one way being better than another. Ordained, religious, married, and single persons are called to be holy in the way of life that has been chosen. Each way is the best one, if it is the one to which God calls us. No way is better in itself than another. What counts is how we live our lives and how we carry out the promise of Baptism. Our ongoing call is

to grow in holiness, because it was in Baptism that we began a lifelong journey to holiness.

The sacrament of Baptism, which is principally a divine conferral of the supernatural gifts of faith, hope, and charity for the merits of Christ, but independent of our merit, is a constant process of spiritual renewal. Jesus' ministry started with His Baptism (Mt 3:13-17). Our Baptism is our first step in faith and in personal holiness. It is important to remember that this process of renewal is continual: we try, we fall, we get up, and we try again. Baptism is a sacrament of continual beginnings that gives us direction on the path toward holiness. As adults, if our Baptism has any real meaning, it has to be expressed in the way we live our daily lives. When the words were said and the water was poured on our heads, we became members of Christ's own family. From that moment on, Christ matters supremely and becomes the context out of which we live our lives. Of course, this process does not happen all at once but is a continual lifelong spiritual journey.

The decision to follow the *Rule* of St. Benedict can be part of this process. Oblate life commits us to a more serious living of baptismal promises. However, we cannot progress in the spiritual life by isolating ourselves from others. God knows that we need help, and He sees to it that we get it, usually from other people. In choosing to become an Oblate, we choose a spiritual association with a group to help us in our striving for holiness. Since each of us is redeemed and sinful, we live with this constant tension: our desire for holiness and, at the same time, our realization of individual weakness and selfishness. In the midst of this tension, when each of us is confronted by individual weaknesses and lack of wholeness in ourselves and in others, our Oblate community and the vowed Benedictine community can provide encouragement and strength. Oblate life gives us a community to help us to become holy and to live out baptismal promises.

### **2.3 The Spiritual Journey or Process**

Baptism demands that we share in Christ's love for His world and for His people. However small and humble our part may be, we do have a part in redemption. Holiness is not a rejection of the world, but includes witness to God's saving action in this world. *Lumen Gentium* states: "The supreme and eternal Priest, Christ Jesus, since he wills to continue his witness and service also through the laity, vivifies them in this Spirit and increasingly urges them on to every good and perfect work. For besides intimately linking them to His life and His mission, He also gives them a sharing in His priestly function of offering spiritual worship for the glory of God and the salvation of men. For this reason the laity, dedicated to Christ and anointed by the Holy Spirit, are marvelously called and wonderfully prepared so that ever more abundant fruits of the

Spirit may be produced in them. For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne - all these become 'spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' (1 Pt 2:5). Together with the offering of the Lord's body, they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God" (34).

The call to holiness comes from Jesus' identification of Himself with us during His own earthly life. Though He was God, He participated in the ordinariness of life, allowing Himself to be baptized to show this identification. His Baptism was the first public step in His ministry. Our Baptism was the first step in our growth in faith and personal holiness. We seek holiness, and the *Rule* of St. Benedict is one time-tested path to holiness. The *Rule* of St. Benedict became widespread in the West because it was found to be a very effective synopsis of Gospel spirituality and of monastic tradition.

### 3. SUMMARY

*We are called to holiness in our everyday lives.*

#### 3.1 Reasons for Deciding to Follow Benedictine Spirituality

- A. Viktor Frankl, Austrian psychologist, wrote that "striving to find meaning in one's life is the primary motivational force in man" (*Man's Search for Meaning*).
- B. Questions about the meaning of life are spiritual questions.
- C. All seek for meaning in life, but sometimes we may be unaware that this is what we are seeking; the pursuit of pleasure, power, or fame may be a disguised form of our fundamental quest for meaning.
- D. God wants us to be holy and to become sharers in His divine nature (CCC, #1-3).
- E. We are called to be saints, with all of our strengths and weaknesses, not according to our accomplishments, but according to God's purpose and grace (CCC, #2012-2019).
- F. God stands ready to help us and waits for our response.
- G. In the pursuit of holiness, the *Rule* of St. Benedict became widespread in the West because it was found to be a very effective synopsis of Gospel spirituality and of monastic tradition.

#### 3.2 Lumen Gentium, the Vatican II Document on the Church

- A. Everyone is called to holiness (CCC, #1-3, #2012-2019).

B. We are justified in Jesus Christ and through Baptism.

- We become adopted children of God.
- We become sharers in the divine nature, in the sense that God is entirely self-giving.

C. Holiness is cultivated by trusting in God.

- Accept conditions, duties and situations as coming from God.
- Cooperate with the divine will and show to others the love with which God loves the world.

D. Each person becomes holy through the way of life chosen.

1. Holiness is attained by following the way that God has chosen for us.
2. Vocation determines our way.
3. Vocation means the way of life to which God has called us.
4. No one way is better than another, provided that it is chosen by God.

### **3.3 The Spiritual Journey or Process**

A. It begins with Baptism, which is principally a divine conferral of supernatural gifts – faith, hope, and love – for the merits of Christ (but independent of our merit).

1. Jesus' ministry started with His Baptism.
2. Our Baptism is our first step for growth in faith and personal holiness.

B. This process of renewal is continual: we are all redeemed and sinful.

C. The decision to follow the *Rule* of St. Benedict can be part of this process.

1. It commits us to a more serious living out of our baptismal promises.
2. It gives us a community to help in living out the baptismal promises.
3. Our spiritual association with a group helps in our striving for holiness.
4. The Oblate community and the vowed Benedictine community can provide encouragement and strength when we are confronted by individual weaknesses and lack of wholeness in ourselves and in others.

## **4. SUPPLEMENTARY READING**

### **4.1 Why people become Oblates**

Why do some Christians wish to become Oblates of St. Benedict? They are attracted to the Oblate Program because they are seeking God in Jesus Christ and have begun to find Him through their acquaintance with a Benedictine community and through the Christian values manifested by the community and its Oblates. Such people have recognized that those Benedictine values, which are ultimately values of the Gospel, have great significance in their own daily lives and in their own quest for God amidst the ordinary circumstances of their work, prayer, and relationships. They have a humble awareness of their own weaknesses and yet know that the God of love calls them to holiness in an ongoing struggle to overcome their defects. They recognize Christ's presence in the Benedictine community and in the spirit of the Rule of St. Benedict, both of which they have come to regard as gifts of God meant to nurture their spiritual lives. They also realize that the grace of God can work in their lives, lived outside the monastery, to make them channels of prayerful support and encouragement to the monastic community. In all these ways they come to discover that God is calling them to be Oblates so that they may find Him more and more in all people, things, and events, until they themselves are transformed by Christ to the point at which they can say, along with St. Paul, "I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20).

In this modern age Oblation may have particular value because of the decline of family life and community life in our culture, even among Christians. In the preface to the *Manual of Benedictine Oblates* (MBO), Archabbot Denis Strittmatter, O.S.B., quoted Archabbot Leander Schnerr, O.S.B., from the 1898 edition of the Manual in stating:

In our day, no less, does the growth of infidelity threaten the world with ruin. The bonds of Christian union are loosening everywhere; in the family as well as in public life their place is being largely taken by a code of unrestraint and license. May St. Benedict, therefore, now as then, with his Order come to the rescue of society, and through the spreading Institute of Secular Oblates effect that families again return to the Christian principles of faith and obedience. Then may we justly hope that society and the state will follow in their wake.

MBO also states (pp. 3-4):

The need which the modern world has of these Benedictine qualities gives the monk a unique role in this day. The Benedictine Order differs from modern congregations in that it has no specific devotion or apostolic work that modifies and determines its type of spirituality. It is simply the leading of the Christian life to the fullest.

This statement can aptly be applied to Oblates just as well as to monks.

## 4.2 The meaning of Oblate life

"Oblate life" may be described as a Christian's affiliation with a Benedictine religious community to enrich and reshape his or her life by the Gospel of Christ as interpreted by the Rule of St. Benedict. Oblates neither live in a religious community nor take religious vows. Instead they seek God by striving to become holy in their chosen way of life as married people, single celibates, or secular clergy. Through their commitment to Benedictine values, Oblates bring the light of Christ into the world and, by their witness to Gospel values, encourage humanity to respond to God's ongoing call of love. Especially in this age of secularization and widespread loss of religious values in Western culture, Oblates can provide a powerful witness to the real possibility of intensive Christian life, even amidst the environment of a largely non-Christian society. Through its pervasive characteristic of encouraging extraordinary holiness in the lives of ordinary, fallible people living among other ordinary, fallible people, whether they be monks or lay people, the Rule provides a significant foundation for such a witness. It is by their good zeal, which brings forth mutual respect, patience with others' weaknesses, and obedience to others out of love of Christ, that such people make room for the grace of God and call upon Him to "bring us all together to everlasting life" (RB 72:12). This vision of mutual support for the sake of spiritual growth is embodied particularly in Chapter 72 of the Rule.

The Oblate then continues to share in the prayers and works of the monastic community, to grow in communion with other Oblates, and to live out the promise of ongoing conversion in Christ, with an ever more persistent turning to Christ in the decisions of one's daily life. This growth in Christ, achieved by God's grace, comes about as monks and Oblates, who belong to the extended family of the Abbey, offer mutual encouragement to one another to seek God by embracing the values proclaimed in the Rule of St. Benedict.

## 4.3 Oblates as "Monasticism's Gift to the World"

(edited from a reflection by Fr. Bede Classick, O.S.B., former Director of Oblates at St. Paul's Abbey, Newton, New Jersey)

Oblates are monasticism's gift to the world. I hope that through this statement all Oblates will come to appreciate who they are. The Oblates are indeed a gift and have much to give to the world, a world which is seeking and searching for its ultimate salvation. The Oblate stands between monasticism and the world as a mediator, linking the two, drawing them together, bringing to the world the values which monasticism holds up as important for the Christian way of life.

Monasticism has done much throughout history to shape life in the world, but monasticism has not influenced the world simply on its own. It has been able to shape Christian life in the world in its day-to-day activities only because those who live in the world have sought to carry out its program of spiritual growth and commitment to Christ.

Oblates especially have understood the close relationship between monastic life as envisioned by St. Benedict and the ordinary Christian life in the world. Affiliating themselves with monastery and convent, they provide a vital link with the world as they reach out to bring hope and inspiration to those struggling to find Christ in the midst of a sinful world.

It is through the Oblates that monasticism opens its heart to the world, and the gift that monasticism offers through Oblates is hospitality, a "cosmic hospitality," a reaching out to embrace the whole universe. It is only in this way that the brokenness of our human lives and of our world can be healed. Oblates will reach out into all areas of life to bring forgiveness and healing, peace and consolation, springing from their affiliation with the monks. As Oblates listen to those in need in order to help them, they will realize that peace and justice are not just causes for which we wave banners but forms of Gospel proclamation. Such is the work of redemption. Hospitality finds its meaning in the Cross. In stretching out His arms on the Cross, Christ opened Himself to the world. He excluded no one but forgave even His enemies. He embraced all so as to redeem all. The Oblate of today must be ready to walk in the steps of Jesus Christ.

The Oblate must be ready to embrace the world in order to forgive and heal and reconcile. Such a welcoming gesture will give others the courage to turn to Christ. Through the hospitality of the Oblate, the monastic values of prayer, humility, obedience, peace, patience, charity, and reverence will be brought to bear on the world and guide it in the way of salvation.

#### **4.4 Who is called to be an Oblate of St. Benedict?**

Being invested as an Oblate novice or making final Oblation is not a matter of entering a religious order. Deciding whether to seek novice Oblation or Oblation would, therefore, not ordinarily require the long, ponderous discernment that a Christian might undergo to make a long-range vocational decision to enter a religious community or take religious vows. However, Oblation does involve a serious and normally lifelong commitment; so the decision should be made with some careful discernment. MBO states, "The Act of Oblation is not a vow and thus does not carry with it the binding force of monastic profession, nor does it bind under sin. Its obligation need not be lifelong; it can be terminated at any moment by the monastery or the Oblate. On the other hand, it should

not be looked upon as of no consequence, since it involves the giving of oneself to God in a solemn way" (pp. 4-5). As in all matters of Christian decision, one should basically be asking, "Does God want me to do this?" In this specific case one should ask, "Does God want me to become an Oblate (novice)?" In other words, "will becoming an Oblate (novice) draw me closer to Christ and the Church, given my state in life and other responsibilities?" A genuine desire to grow in holiness and a sense of gratitude for the gift of contact with the Rule and/or Benedictines can generally be interpreted as a sign of God's call.

St. Benedict gives us some helpful criteria to make this decision. He says that a candidate for monastic vows should "truly seek God" and "show eagerness for the Work of God, for obedience and for trials" (RB 58:7). We can explore these four criteria in terms of the commitment of every Christian:

### **Truly Seeking God**

All Christians should seek God above all else and seek to grow in discipleship of Jesus Christ. Oblates should seek to intensify their daily commitment of faith to making their journey of life in Christ and with Christ.

### **Eagerness for the Work of God**

Oblates should have a desire to enter more fully into community prayer and, in particular, the "Divine Office" as prayed by the monastic community. Normally, this desire will be expressed by a frequent praying of the Office from a breviary of the Oblate's choice.

### **Eagerness for Obedience**

Listening for God's word in every person and every situation is a fundamental goal and an ongoing task of the monk. Oblates should long for growth in attentiveness to God's word and in loving, faith-filled response to God's word, whether spoken through Scripture and liturgy or through the ordinary people and experiences encountered in daily life.

### **Eagerness for Trials**

"Becoming obedient to death" in imitation of Christ can be a heavy yoke indeed, and yet it is a yoke that becomes light when shared with Christ. Psychologically healthy people do not welcome trials for the sake of hardship itself; however, monks and Oblates come to realize that God can speak to us and transform us in a special way through trials. A patient, faith-filled response to trials can lead the Christian to deeper identification with Christ and greater compassion for others in their suffering.

#### 4.5 Benedictine Values for Oblates: Seeking God

Seeking God above all else is the root of all the other Benedictine values. Seeking God is a matter of living in God's love and growing in that love. Seeking God means loving Him with all one's heart, mind, soul, and strength and, therefore, following Christ wherever He may lead us. Seeking God is not just a part-time activity but a full time, moment-by-moment quest to know how God works in one's everyday life and how He leads us lovingly on a lifelong journey of faith. The Oblate knows in faith that "God is always with us" (RB 7:23) and is "aware that God's gaze is upon [us], wherever [we] may be" (RB 4:49). Therefore, the Oblate is eager to surrender to God more and more, with and in Christ, until his or her thirst for God's presence is fully satisfied in heaven. This quest for God is undertaken not only in solitude and private prayer but also in the busyness of work and amidst a community of fellow-seekers.

#### 5. SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

##### [The Vocation of Being an Oblate and How To Live It](#)

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC, #1-3, #2012-2019), United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1994. [https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P2.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P2.HTM)

[https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P71.HTM](https://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P71.HTM)

Esther de Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict* (Liturgical Press)

Fr. Demetrius Dumm, O.S.B., *Cherish Christ Above All: The Bible in the Rule of Benedict* (Paulist Press)

Basil G. Cardinal Hume, O.S.B., *Searching for God* (Paulist Press)

Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: *Lumen Gentium*, Pauline Books & Media, Boston, 1965.

#### 6. REFLECTION QUESTIONS

This [link](#) provides an opportunity to share your responses to a few questions after you have read, reflected on and prayed over a lesson's topic. (It is not required to provide answers to the questions but Oblate Novices are encouraged to do so.)

##### **Oblates & Genuine Conversion**

This section contains two factual questions; all answers are found in that lesson or pertain to it.

- 1. What is the meaning of the word “oblate” (Latin oblatus)?**
- 2. What qualities are seen in a person who is progressing in holiness? Is this growth always detectable?**

### **Personal Conversion of Life**

This section contains your choice of one reflection question. Please reply to one of the following three questions (though you are welcome to reply to more than one, if you wish):

- 3. Do you desire holiness? Where can you find strength and support to allow for this growth?**
- 4. In what areas of your life do you seek growth in personal holiness?**
- 5. In what practical ways do you plan to seek this growth in personal holiness?**

## Lesson 2: St. Benedict and His Rule

### INTRODUCTION

Pax!

May you find Christ's peace in your life with a right balance and a healthy rhythm of prayer and work, with the prayerful reading of Scripture and the Rule, with the study of lessons, with silent listening to God, and with your association with the Benedictine community of monks and affiliated Oblates.

As you worked through Lesson One, you may have found certain times of the day better than others for reading the lesson, reading and praying the Scripture verses, and reflecting on the passages from the Rule. You may have spoken with other Oblates, or attended an Oblate meeting. You may have consulted a commentary or found a similar message pronounced in the Scripture readings at Mass, contained in a homily, or simply discovered in your daily life. As you receive future lessons, watch for these interconnections; they come as delightful surprises!

You also may have a better understanding of how much time is required to complete a lesson in its entirety based on the circumstances in your life. One lesson may draw you to allot more time for studying and reflecting on its message while another lesson may not. You may have a very busy schedule during one month, while another month has more free time. What is important is that you continue to find time for prayer and reflection in a balanced way. The Benedictine motto of ora et labora, prayer and work, speaks to the need for a healthy balance of prayer and work that is not restrictive but allows God to enter and to sanctify each and every day.

We hope that over the past month, you have secured a Bible and a breviary for Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. If you have not yet completed Lesson One's assigned reading in the Oblate Formation Booklet, please try to read those pages before beginning Lesson Two. The Rule will continue to remain an important part of your journey with different passages referenced in each lesson. The calendar which lists sequential daily passages in the Rule allows for a full and continuous reading. Commentaries are also available to help guide you in understanding the wisdom of St. Benedict.

*Lesson Two will consider the life and the Rule of St. Benedict so that we may better understand what Benedictine Oblate life offers in our pursuit of holiness.*

## 1. PRAYER

(This section provides the prayer that is prayed every night at the beginning of Vigils in our monastery along with Old and New Testament passages. There are more passages at the end of this document. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

*Come, O Holy Spirit, replenish the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your divine love.*

*Excite, O Lord, in your Church, the Spirit which our Most Holy Father, St. Benedict served; that filled with the same, we may study to love what he loved and practice what he taught. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

### 1.1 Old Testament Scripture

“Now, if you obey me completely and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession among all peoples, though all the earth is mine. You will be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. That is what you must tell the Israelites” (Ex 19:5-6).

### 1.2 New Testament Scripture

“Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me’” (Jn 14:6).

### 1.3 The Rule of St. Benedict

“Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to everlasting life” (RB 72:11-12).

*Let all the faithful rejoice in the glory of our holy Father Benedict, and especially those who follow his Rule, praising him here on earth as the saints rejoice with him in heaven.*

(Magnificat Antiphon, Feast of St. Benedict)

## 2. READINGS

*Following the Rule of St. Benedict can help us in our seeking of holiness.*

### 2.1 The Meaning of Holiness and Sainthood

Before beginning the presentation of St. Benedict and his *Rule*, it is good to reflect on the meaning of sainthood as understood by the Church. The Church defines a saint as “the

‘holy one’ who leads a life in union with God through the grace of Christ and receives the reward of eternal life. The Church is called the communion of saints, of the holy ones” (CCC, p. 898). “The Church... is held as a matter of faith, to be unfailingly holy. This is because Christ, the Son of God, who with the Father and the Spirit is hailed as ‘alone holy,’ loved the Church as his Bride, giving himself up for her so as to sanctify her; he joined her to himself as his body and endowed her with the gift of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God’ (*Lumen Gentium*, 39). The Church then is ‘the holy People of God,’ and her members are called ‘saints’” (CCC, #823, with references to *Lumen Gentium*, 12; Acts 9:13, 1 Cor 6:1, 1 Cor 16:1). “The communion of saints is the Church” (CCC, #946). Canonization is “the solemn declaration by the Pope that a deceased member of the faithful may be proposed as a model and intercessor to the Christian faithful and venerated as a saint on the basis that the person lived a life of heroic virtue or remained faithful to God through martyrdom” (CCC, p. 869).

## **2.2 Dialogues, Book II, of Pope St. Gregory the Great (Pontificate 590-604 A.D.)**

St. Benedict is universally recognized as one of the greatest figures in monastic history and is known as the Patriarch of Western Monasticism; yet we know very little about him. Information about the life of St. Benedict comes from *Dialogues, Book II*, by Pope St. Gregory the Great, whose pontificate was from 590 to 604 A.D., a half-century after St. Benedict’s death. St. Gregory is one of our vital links in learning about the life of St. Benedict and in understanding the early Church. All of St. Gregory’s writings serve a pastoral purpose. St. Gregory described the *Rule* of St. Benedict as being notable for its discernment and clarity of language. His specific purpose in writing about St. Benedict was to show how God can work in the life of a person who listens to God and cooperates with Him. It has been questioned as to whether St. Gregory’s writings about the miracles and happenings in the life of St. Benedict are actual or symbolic. Scholarly opinion now holds that the stories about St. Benedict are for the most part genuine, though it is not always easy to separate the real from what may have been exaggerated.

## **2.3 St. Benedict’s Life**

According to St. Gregory, St. Benedict was born in Nursia, a small town northeast of Rome, Italy about 480 A.D. He was born into a well-to-do family and was sent to Rome for higher education. After a short time St. Benedict left Rome because he was disturbed by the vices of his fellow students and by the atmosphere of moral corruption in the big city. Abandoning both his studies and his inheritance, he chose to live as a hermit for several years in a cave in Subiaco. During this time of solitude and growth in prayer, a monk named Romanus quietly supplied him with necessities.

## **2.4 St. Benedict Became Abbot of Monastery in Vicovaro**

After some three years, monks from a nearby monastery in Vicovaro, hearing of St. Benedict's holiness, asked him to be their abbot. Those monks, however, soon found his regulations to be too severe, and they tried to serve him poisoned table wine. Their plot failed when St. Benedict blessed the goblet, which immediately broke, so that the poisoned wine flowed out.

### **2.5 St. Benedict Returned to the Hermitage in Subiaco**

Realizing the futility of trying to govern such an unruly community, St. Benedict returned to his hermitage in Subiaco. In time, as he acquired a reputation for holiness and miracles and as his sanctity was recognized, more and more people came to his cave for spiritual advice. A group of sincere disciples gathered around him, whom he ultimately banded into twelve monasteries, each with twelve monks and an abbot. Once again, there was an attempt to kill him, this time by a local priest who brought the abbot a loaf of poisoned bread. On this occasion, St. Benedict sensed that something was amiss and had his pet raven carry the loaf away.

### **2.6 St. Benedict as Founder of the Abbey of Monte Cassino (529 A.D.)**

About 529 A.D., St. Benedict left the monasteries in Subiaco in charge of others and set off with several companions for Cassino, a small town located 80 miles south of Rome. He took possession of an abandoned fortress located on top of the mountain that overlooked that city. He proceeded to destroy the pagan shrines that had been established there and replaced them with two Christian chapels.

### **2.7 St. Benedict Wrote His Rule and Lived at Monte Cassino**

Here St. Benedict founded the Abbey of Monte Cassino, where he wrote the *Rule* (abbreviated RB) and lived the rest of his life. His reputation grew as an outstanding man of God who could work wonders. He advised secular leaders, calmed invaders, showed care for the poor, sent out monks to preach, and founded another monastery in Terracina, which was the first of a long series of monasteries that would eventually grow out of Monte Cassino.

Toward the end of his life, St. Benedict had a noteworthy encounter with his sister, St. Scholastica, who was the leader of a group of nuns near Cassino. He had to abandon his plans to return to the monastery for the night when his sister's prayers brought about a heavy rain storm. As a result, the pair was able to engage in a long spiritual conversation that prepared both of them for death. Shortly after the encounter, St. Benedict had a vision of St. Scholastica's entry into heaven. As his own death approached, St. Benedict looked out of his window to see the whole world gathered in a single beam of light. St.

Gregory wrote that this vision revealed that St. Benedict's spirit was being enlarged to embrace all things in Christ. After foreseeing his own death, St. Benedict died in Monte Cassino about 547 A.D.

St. Benedict was, in fact, a great monastic teacher with a profound sense of tradition, who knew how to use the works of his predecessors. He borrowed much from the *Rule of the Master* and was influenced by the writings of Pachomius, Basil, Cassian, Augustine, and Caesarius of Arles. From these contributions, St. Benedict created his *Rule*, which included both spiritual teaching and practical regulations for the ordering of daily life in a monastery. Like all of the ancient monks, St. Benedict considered the true and ultimate rule of life to be the Word of God contained in Scripture. Monasticism was simply the Christian life lived in a fashion that helped the monk to experience God. This understanding of monastic life explains why St. Benedict called his work "a little rule for beginners." He was not downplaying the importance of what he had written but was pointing to the great rule, the Word of God.

## 2.8 The Rule of St. Benedict

The *Rule* of St. Benedict, being a masterful synthesis of earlier rules and writings, combines monastic traditions from Gaul, Africa, Egypt, Cappadocia, and Italy. Its broad vision of humanity sets it apart from other Latin rules. Such clarity and liberality of mind could only have come from one who had long pondered the Word of God. With his abiding focus on Scripture, St. Benedict was able to envision the essential harmony existing within the varied strands of tradition. Eventually, the *Rule* of St. Benedict supplanted all other monastic rules in the West, because the *Rule* focused on fundamental Scriptural principles of monasticism in a simple way, free of extensive and complicated details, and allowed for application to different times and places.

The *Rule* of St. Benedict is very short. Chapters 1-7 contain spiritual doctrine and deal with the fundamental aspects of monastic life: fraternal unity, the teaching role of the abbot, obedience, silence, and humility. Chapters 8-71 deal with the ascetic discipline of monasticism to foster peaceful and charitable community living. Liturgical prayer, times of meals, rules for sleeping, etc., are included. There is a section that addresses corrections and punishments, along with encouragements, so that monks may strive for the best possible behavior. This is followed by a section dealing with the reception of new members, order in the community, work, hospitality, etc. Chapter 72 is the concluding chapter (except for the epilogue), which provides short insightful advice regarding fraternal relations. As one can see throughout the *Rule*, St. Benedict obviously understood that human nature was varied and complex and that individual problems required individual solutions.

## 2.9 Overview and Value of the Rule

St. Benedict leaves a great deal to the discretion, good sense, and charity of the abbot. He shows a vast understanding of human weakness by providing compassion for the troubled and by offering challenges for the strong. A spirit of moderation is expressed, along with a remarkable fatherly concern for the individual monk. St. Benedict insists on the formative value of the holy reading of Scripture (*lectio divina*) and teaches that meditation on what has been read leads to prayer and deepens it. He also insists on the value of honest work, not only as a support to the monastery, but also as a physical discipline and as a way to earn alms for the poor. The *Rule* of St. Benedict shows fidelity to the best traditions of Christian monasticism.

## 2.10 Oblates Become Affiliated with Monasteries

During the centuries that followed St. Benedict's death, the monastic way of life outlined in his *Rule* spread throughout Europe, and Benedictine monasteries became centers of prayer, culture, and education. In Chapter 59 of the *Rule*, mention is made of young boys who were "offered" by their parents to the monasteries for religious training and education. These boys lived in the community, shared the daily round of religious activities, and became known as "oblates." In the course of time, adult lay people asked to be associated with the prayer and work of the monks, even while they remained active in their homes, families and secular occupations. Over the centuries, such informal arrangements became more formalized, and these "secular Oblates" were officially received in a ceremony as they offered themselves to God and promised to regulate their lives according to the spirit of the *Rule* of St. Benedict. These Oblates prayed in union with the monks as best they could and applied the teachings of the *Rule* to their lives in the world. Today, thousands of Oblates throughout the world pray and work in spiritual union with Benedictine men and women of various communities. In this way, they both receive and share spiritual strength and inspiration, and they strive to grow in holiness as a result of following the *Rule* of St. Benedict.

## 3. SUMMARY

### 3.1 The Meaning of Holiness and Sainthood

- D. A saint leads a life in union with God through the grace of Christ and receives the reward of eternal life.
- E. Canonization is "the solemn declaration by the Pope that a deceased member of the faithful may be proposed as a model and intercessor to the Christian faithful and venerated as a saint on the basis that the person lived a life of heroic virtue or remained faithful to God through martyrdom" (CCC, p. 869).

- F. The Church is Christ's Bride, and as His Body, the Church is held "as a matter of faith to be unfailingly holy" as Christ "endowed her with the gift of the Holy Spirit for the glory of God" (*Lumen Gentium*, 39 [CCC, #946]).
- G. "The Church then is 'the holy People of God,' and her members are called 'saints' (CCC, #823, with references to *Lumen Gentium*, 12; Acts 9:13, 1 Cor 6:1, 1 Cor 16:1).
- H. "The communion of saints is the Church" (CCC, #946).

### **3.2 Dialogues, Book II, of Pope St. Gregory the Great**

- A. St. Gregory's writings were written with pastoral purpose after death of St. Benedict.
- B. *Life and Miracles* was written to help Christians know the life of St. Benedict.
- C. It helps us understand the early Church.
- D. It shows how God works in the life of a person who listens and cooperates with God.
- E. The writing is genuine, but it is not always easy to separate what is real from what is legendary.

### **3.3 St. Benedict's Life**

- A. He was born about 480 A.D. in Nursia, Italy, to a well-to-do family.
- B. He was sent to Rome for higher education.
- C. He fled from moral corruption and abandoned his studies and inheritance.
- D. He lived in a cave in Subiaco as a hermit and was cared for by Romanus.
- E. This was a time of solitude and growth in prayer.

### **3.4 St. Benedict Became Abbot of Monastery in Vicovaro**

- A. Monks requested St. Benedict to become abbot for their monastic community.
- B. Monks found regulations too severe and put poison in his wine.
- C. St. Benedict blessed the goblet which broke so that the poisoned wine flowed out.
- D. St. Benedict realized the futility of governing that unruly community.

### **3.5 St. Benedict Returned to the Hermitage in Subiaco**

- A. He acquired the reputation for holiness and for the working of miracles.
- B. His sanctity was recognized, many came to him for spiritual advice.

- C. Twelve monasteries were founded, each with twelve monks and an abbot.
- D. A priest sent him poisoned bread, but at his command, his raven carried the loaf away.

### **3.6 St. Benedict as Founder of the Abbey of Monte Cassino**

- A. He left the Subiaco abbeys in charge of others and traveled to Cassino, south of Rome.
- B. He took possession of an abandoned fortress, destroyed pagan temples, and replaced them with two Christian chapels.
- C. Abbey of Monte Cassino was built on a mountain top overlooking the city.

### **3.7 St. Benedict Wrote His Rule and Lived at Monte Cassino**

- A. His reputation grew as a man of God who could work wonders.
- B. He advised secular leaders, calmed invaders, cared for poor, and sent out monks to preach.
- C. He founded a monastery in Terracina, the first of a long series of monasteries.
- D. St. Scholastica
  - 1. She was the leader of a group of nuns near Cassino.
  - 2. Her prayer brought a heavy rain storm that allowed for a long spiritual conversation with her brother, St. Benedict.
  - 3. This encounter prepared both of them for their deaths.
- E. Visions of St. Benedict
  - 1. He saw St. Scholastica's entry into heaven.
  - 2. He also envisioned the whole world gathered into a single beam of light (through his spirit's embracing of Christ).
- F. St. Benedict Died in the Abbey of Monte Cassino about 547 A.D.

### **3.8 The Rule of St. Benedict**

- A. St. Benedict used Scripture and the works of his predecessors from many traditions to create a simple "little rule for beginners" that can be applied to different times and places.
  - 1. The ultimate great rule of life is the Word of God in Scripture.
  - 2. The *Rule* has an abiding focus on Scripture, with references to over 185 Old and New Testament verses.
  - 3. It borrowed much from the *Rule of the Master*.

4. It was influenced by the writings of St. Pachomius, St. Basil, John Cassian, and St. Augustine.
  5. It combined monastic traditions from Gaul, Africa, Egypt, Cappadocia, and Italy.
- B. St. Benedict's audience
1. His first readers were the monks in his own community.
  2. Later his *Rule* supplanted all other monastic rules in the West.
  3. The *Rule* now applies to all seekers of holiness.
  4. St. Benedict became known as the Patriarch of Western Monasticism.
- C. Spiritual teaching and practical rules for daily life in a monastery
1. The *Rule* includes spiritual doctrine and fundamental aspects of monastic life (RB 1-7).
  2. Fraternal unity is a key value throughout the *Rule*.
  3. The teaching role of the abbot is essential.
  4. Obedience, silence, humility are three fundamental values (RB 5-7).
- D. Monasticism and its ascetic discipline (RB 8-71)
1. Peace and charity must prevail in communal living.
  2. The structure of each day includes: liturgical prayer, work, meals, silence, and rules for sleeping.
  3. The *Rule* provides for corrections and encouragement.
  4. There are precepts for the reception of new members and order in the community.
  5. The *Rule* proclaims the value of honest work as support to the monastery, as physical discipline, and as almsgiving.
  6. Hospitality means receiving all as Christ.
- E. The crowning chapter on fraternal relationships is "The Good Zeal of Monks" (RB 72).

### 3.9 Overview and Value of the Rule

- A. Much is left to the discretion, good sense, and charity of the abbot.
- B. The Rule insists on the formative value of spiritual reading (*lectio divina*).
- C. The Rule calls for compassion for the weak and offers challenges for the strong.

- D. The Rule shows remarkable fatherly concern for individual monks.
- E. The spirit of moderation prevails in many of the regulations.
- F. The Rule exhibits fidelity to the best traditions of Christian monasticism.

### **3.10 Oblates Become Affiliated with Monasteries**

- A. Monasteries became centers of prayer, culture, and education; parents offered boys to the monastery (RB 59).
- B. Known as Oblates, these young boys lived in community with the monks.
- C. Later adult lay people, active in the world, asked to be associated with the monastery.
- D. Secular Oblates are officially received in a ceremony, offering themselves to God and promising to regulate their lives in accordance with the Rule of St. Benedict.
- E. Today thousands of Oblates throughout the world pray and work in spiritual union with Benedictine men and women of various communities and seek to grow in holiness in fellowship with their monastic communities.

## **4. SUPPLEMENTARY READING**

### **4.1 Applying the Rule Outside the Monastery**

Introducing the Rule to lay people raises certain questions since it was written for monks -- specifically for cenobites, men who live together under an abbot and make a vow of stability, which attaches them to a certain community that lives in some separation from the rest of society. How, then, can the Rule be applied to those not living in a monastic community under an abbot? The difficulty can be resolved if one examines more closely the nature of the Rule and its contents.

When Benedict wrote the Rule in the sixth century, the various religious orders, each with its own charism, did not yet exist in the Church; there were no clearly distinct patterns of religious life. Benedict did not set out to create a way of life different from those that preceded him by emphasizing some particular cult or devotion; rather, he wished to formulate the Christian concepts of prayer, work, community, and ongoing spiritual growth into a workable plan that would help the monk to be attuned to God's presence in every activity of the day. Not adding anything new to Christian doctrine, Benedict took the spirituality of early Christian times, which was based on Gospel values, and applied it to everyday life in an orderly fashion so that a habitual focus on Christ and the values of the Kingdom might permeate the monk's entire day and all his relationships. It is this spirit of continual refocusing on Christ amidst prayer and work in daily living that

characterizes the Rule and gives it its universal applicability. Furthermore, the insights into human nature and into the principles which regulate human relationships, which appear throughout the Rule, remain the same for both monks and lay people, in both the sixth century and the twenty-first century.

Thus lay people and secular clergy who seek to live according to the Rule are not asked to add anything new to their understanding of Christian life and worship but to be enlightened more fully how to "prefer nothing to Christ" and to practice this fundamental principle in all their undertakings, "whether in affairs of Church, business, government, or any other area of life" (CE, p. 4). Br. Benet Tvedten, O.S.B., comments, "The Rule is centered on Christ and the Christian life. The ordinary Christian can accept this rule as an aid to living a virtuous life within the Church. The Rule of St. Benedict reminds us of the order we should have in our lives, the priorities, and the discipline" (SK, p. 15).

Many contemporary lay Christians have found great relevance in the Rule as applied to daily life. Esther de Waal, an Anglican lay woman who has been deeply attracted to the Benedictine way since the early 1980's, writes, "It [the Rule] was neither remote nor past nor cerebral, but immediate and relevant, speaking of things that I already half-knew or was struggling to make sense of. ... Above all, it spoke of a life that was essentially unheroic, much in fact like the life of any ordinary Christian family. ... The Rule speaks to those who, like myself, are seeking God in the midst of a busy, often confusing and exhausting daily life" (SG, p.12). Oblate Norvene Vest likewise observes, "The whole orientation of the Rule is to the principle that God is everywhere, all the time, and thus that every element of our ordinary day is potentially holy. Very few of us believe that and/or act on it. Benedict urges us both to believe and so to act. It is an enormous challenge, involving life-long response, and yet it is very simple and can be begun at this moment. Because the Rule is so 'homely', so oriented to the opportunities of daily life as grist for the mill of Christian consecration, it has a great deal to say which is directly helpful to a Christian lay person, struggling to live the Christian life even in our contemporary secular world" (PC, p. 1). Brian Taylor, another author, remarks about the Rule that "through the development of attitudes about such ordinary things as money, possessions, time, authority, and food, the monk (and the man and woman 'in the world') is radically transformed by grace" (SEL, p. 2). Furthermore, "in ordering one's life according to a form of spirituality that thousands of people have lived with and found freedom in for fifteen hundred years, one has a better chance of growing in grace than through any lifestyle one could dream up on one's own" (SEL, p. 13).

## 4.2 How to Read the Rule

Before one can begin to read the Rule intelligently and fruitfully, one must understand the type of document it was meant to be. Fr. Terrence Kardong, O.S.B., comments, "A monastic rule is a literary phenomenon in its own right, with its own characteristics and genre. A Christian monastic rule is an attempt to concretize the Gospel demands of Jesus in a given situation and community. Because a monastic rule is an interpretation of the Gospel, we should always ask what Gospel values a given passage is trying to inculcate" (TU, p. 7). Thus the Rule is not principally a set of rules. "A rule, in the sense used by St. Benedict, means a plan for living with others in a certain way. It is the glue of monastery life. It is the common denominator. It is the understanding that exists between the members of a monastic community" (BW, p. 9). While the Rule provides norms for the living of Christian life in community, it "is best understood as wisdom literature. The insights of the past provide a basis for understanding ourselves and our world. ... The RB should not be approached as legislation. ... Read it as you would good poetry or allegory" (BW, p. 11). The wisdom of the Rule pertains to all Christians because it arose from the daily lived experience of St. Benedict and the monastic communities that preceded him. Esther de Waal asserts that St. Benedict "was happy to take what was good from the existing monastic heritage, to make it his own, and to color it with his own personal experience. ... The consummate wisdom which it [the Rule] shows could only have emerged from a long and thorough assimilation, not simply in his mind but in his whole being" (SG, p. 18). Modern authors as well as thousands of lay people who have come to cherish the wisdom of the Rule realize that "Benedict's message is for all of us, not just monks. And it will transform us if we are ready to give up our own way ...." (BW, p. 11).

How, then, are we today to tap into this practical wisdom and to begin to assimilate the Rule's relevant values? We must read it and reflect on it as *lectio divina*. Having become aware of the marvelous challenge of the Rule from her personal experience, Norvene Vest shares with us that "the modern reader often finds the Rule hard to understand, even though it emphasizes daily life. That is because it is written within the context of the ancient monastic art of *lectio divina*, and it needs to be read in that way, if it is to be truly appreciated. *Lectio divina* literally means 'divine reading', and carries the same double meaning in Latin as in English: what is being read is divine/holy, usually the Scriptures; and how it is being read is with the help of God's Spirit. In order for this 'how' to happen, one slows down radically so as to open up freely. It is the monastic insight that reading, if it be authentic, cannot be undertaken simply with the eyes and the mind. Rather, it must involve the whole person: mind, heart, body and spirit. It is reading not so much for information as for formation, that is, for encounter with the living God in this moment in such a way that one's heart catches fire and one's life is transformed" (PC, p. 1). Fr. Luke Dysinger likewise tells us, "If we wish to recover the wisdom of St. Benedict's Rule,

it is not enough simply to read it. As moderns we read in order to acquire information, to be 'in-formed.' In St. Benedict's day reading a sacred or spiritual text was practiced not so much for the sake of 'information,' but rather in order to be 'formed': that is, to be inwardly changed or shaped. ... If we are to rediscover St. Benedict's insights, we must read his Rule in a spirit of *lectio divina*" (LD, pp. vi-vii).

Thus the aim of "reading" the Rule (i.e., pondering the verses of the Rule in a slow, prayerful way) is to dispose ourselves to welcome God's ever-present grace and His efforts to conquer our hearts and transform us more and more into a holy people, other-Christians. The same principle applies to reading the Bible. It makes no sense to read the Rule as if it were a novel or a newspaper or a set of directions. One must place oneself in God's presence and be eager to hear God's message and to grow in union with Christ. Such growth is possible because throughout the Rule "St. Benedict points to Christ. It is as simple as that. Christ is the beginning, the way and the end. The Rule continually points beyond itself to Christ Himself, and in this it has allowed, and will continue to allow, men and women in every age to find in what it says depths and levels relevant to their needs and their understanding at 18 any stage on their journey, provided that they are truly seeking God" (SG, p. 23).

According to RB+, the Rule "remains a complete treatment of all the essentials required for cenobitic life [i.e., the life of monks in community]: both the spiritual doctrine and the practical ordering of life are provided in quite a full manner. ... St. Benedict had the clear vision of a man who instinctively perceives what is important and isolates it from the mass of secondary detail" (p. 91). In its overall structure, the Rule is divided between spiritual doctrine (the Prologue and chapters 1-7) and regulations for community living (chapters 8-73); however, these later chapters also contain much spiritual doctrine amidst the details of organization and good order. The Prologue is an exhortatory sermon in its own right which is "designed to produce a direct and dramatic effect on the hearer" (TU, p. 12). Included among the regulations are sections on the Divine Office (chs. 8-20); on delinquency and punishments (23-30, 43-46); on the acceptance of new members and the order of the community (58-63); on monastic officials (21-22, 64-66); on material goods (31-34); on food and sleep (35-42); on work, prayer, and exterior relationships (47-52); and on guests and related subjects (53-57). Finally, there is an appendix (67-73), which deals largely with fraternal relationships, one of the Rule's special emphases.

### 4.3 The Prologue

The Prologue may be regarded as a stirring invitation to the reader from God Himself to renew one's Christian commitment and to receive true life. Here the Rule "speaks to all of us. Right at the very start ... its approach is wide open: 'Whoever

you may be ... he that has ears to hear.' A variety of images comes tumbling out as in his excitement St. Benedict addresses his listeners at one moment as recruits for the army, and the next as workmen in God's workshop, then as pilgrims on the road, then as disciples at school. Each of us hears the call in different ways. ... But ... the message is to be heard now, we must rouse ourselves, shake ourselves out of our apathy. The Rule questions the assumptions by which we live and looks at some of the most basic questions that we must all face. ... There is no evasion here of the complexity of life, and yet the final paradox is that running the way to God appears modest and manageable while at the same time it is total. These are the demands of extreme simplicity which cost everything" (SG, pp. 28-29). It is significant that the first word of the Rule is "listen" (in Latin *obsculta*). Like the bells of a monastery calling monks to prayer, the whole Rule summons disciples to persistent, lifelong listening to the voice of the Lord. This call is especially significant in our culture, which tempts us to self centered indifference to what really matters. "Benedict calls us from spiritual inertia to spiritual initiative, from complacency to action. ... Benedict's call to holiness is an alarm -- a wake-up call. ... All the spiritual traditions teach that the unenlightened state is like being asleep. It has never been more true than in contemporary Western society. ... Television, advertising, and all the tools of popular culture continually bombard us with seductive and hypnotic false images. If we are not careful, this false culture can dull our senses and lull us into a kind of trance .... Benedict calls us to awake out of this dozy world and face reality. Beginning the spiritual journey means we must wake up and see ourselves and our world for the first time" (LMS, pp. 3-4).

Thus the Prologue challenges all Christians to be "ready to renounce their own wills and to labor under obedience to seek God alone" (MBO, p. 26). For the Christian, progress in "faith and good works" constitutes success, whereas pride in one's own efforts must be seen as a key temptation that is to be crushed by a continual turning to Christ. Ordaining nothing harsh and burdensome, the Rule nonetheless points out the way to amend evil habits and to grow in Christ's love through moderate discipline. St. Benedict urges all Christians humbly to welcome the radiant light that comes from God, stirring us out of complacency, making us aware of our own sinfulness, and attuning us to the continual outpouring of graces that can heal our defects and make us holy. The monk and the Oblate learn to become good listeners in the ordinary affairs of daily life so that God may lead them on the road to sanctity.

#### **4.4 Spiritual Doctrine**

The central values of the Rule appear in RB 4-7. Like the Prologue, these exhortations to Christian living apply largely as they stand not only to monks but to any committed Christian seeking to grow in obedience, humility, a spirit of silence, trust in God and

hope in His mercy, devotion to frequent prayer, death to sin and rising to life in Christ, and love of God with one's whole being. Chapter 4, the "Instruments of Good Works," stands as a treatise on its own and provides the reader with a list of 74 Christian maxims, each of which could be the subject of prolonged meditation; these are concise phrases that can serve to awaken us to God's call in the various situations in daily life. "This chapter [RB 4] is full of riches, and four lifetimes would be too short to plumb its depths .... We see how it is imbued with Scripture, and how its simple wisdom flows from a profound understanding of God's grace working within and through the complexities of human nature" (LMS, p. 42). Norvene Vest suggests that this chapter "is a poem with rhythmic cadences in the Latin which allow it to be memorized, taking root in one's heart. Thus it can be carried throughout the day, as a way to hold priorities before one's eyes, so as never to be separated from God" (PC, p. 28). The three major values of obedience, silence, and humility pervade the entire Rule. In particular, humility, the subject of the longest chapter of the Rule, "is the virtue upon which Benedict places greatest importance. The beginning of all sanctity is an awareness of our own nothingness and our utter dependence on God" (MBO, p. 39).

It is important to realize that the three key values of RB 5-7 are essentially interrelated as dimensions of a vibrant Christian life. The Latin word for obedience, *obaudire*, comes from the word *audire*, to listen, and means "to listen thoroughly." In order to be obedient, that is to listen to and for God's word, one must nurture a certain silence of lips, mind, and heart. In order to obey, one also must be humbly receptive. Humility encourages one to think, "I am not the ultimate source of wisdom; I need to change again and again according to God's will for me, which often reveals itself through other fallible human beings." Humility likewise nurtures an eagerness to let God's word transform oneself so that one seeks to be silent and obedient. Silence is not to be sought for its own sake but for loving obedience to God, for which we were created; and silence is an outgrowth of humility, since a humble heart knows its insufficiency and becomes silent in readiness to hear. All these virtues are naturally directed to love, since the aim of all virtue is to enable the monk or Oblate to "arrive at that 'perfect love' of God which 'casts out fear' (1 Jn 4:18)" (RB 7:67). Our lives are to become permeated by Christ's own life until all our thoughts, words, and actions become reflections of Christ's own generous, self-giving, self-sacrificing love.

#### **4.5 The Liturgical Code (Chs. 8-20)**

These chapters form a bridge between the chapters on spiritual doctrine and those on the organization of community life. This arrangement can remind us that prayer is the hinge on which depends both our growth in virtue and our charitable functioning in family and community. Although neither monks nor Oblates are expected to heed the detailed formulas for communal prayer specified by St.

Benedict, these 13 chapters testify to the importance of community worship for all committed Christians and include the eternally relevant plea "that our minds [be] in harmony with our voices" (RB 19:7) when we pray aloud.

Abbot Parry comments, "The amount of space St. Benedict devotes to organizing the Divine Office is significant of the importance he attached to it. Nor was it merely a matter of long vocal prayer. For the early monks understood prayer to be the principal means for attaining union with God, and union with God was the end of human living and therefore of the monastic organization. It should be noted that while Chs. VIII-XX are all about prayer, the subject recurs again and again in the Rule. It is hardly too much to say that it gives meaning to the whole" (AP, p. xiii).

St. Benedict's allotment of large blocks of time each day for community prayer and *lectio divina* is aimed at nurturing the monk's continual awareness of God's loving presence, or "practice of the presence of God." This purpose seems to be revealed in the "practical examples which St. Benedict gives of the times outside those times of formal prayer at which the monk offers that particular happening, that particular person, to God with a brief prayer. ... This is a re-focusing of our attention on God at specific moments" (SG, p. 151). This goal of total attentiveness to God is a fundamental value to be lived by Oblates. Genuine prayer must overflow into a prayerful life, a God-centered existence; and our authentic daily Christian living is necessarily supported by prayer that opens us to Christ's transforming love. Thus "our prayer reflects the way in which we respond to life itself, and so our prayer can only be as good as the way we live" (SG, p. 151). Growing in attentiveness to God's presence leads us to realize that it is God who seeks us first, so that performing the "Work of God" means "not so much that we actually say prayers as that we live open to grace" (SG, p. 153). St. Benedict offers us the opportunity to be as available as possible to God's loving call so that "if we are truly seeking God, we know that we shall be found by Him" (SG, p. 154). Amidst all our talk about arduous efforts to seek God in prayer and work, it should be consoling to know that it is He who takes the initiative and He who provides the overflowing grace for our every response; we need only to trust, to let go of our selfish ways, and to respond lovingly to the love of Christ poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit!

#### **4.6 Practical Arrangements for Community Living and the Principle of "moderation"**

"... Because it [the Rule] is also essentially a working document, legislation for the common shared life of a group of men (and we know from the Dialogues of St. Gregory the Great, AD 590-604, how disparate a group Benedict gathered around him at Monte Cassino), many of the chapters are concerned with minutiae which today make tedious, sometimes apparently irrelevant, reading. It is important to recognize this

and see beyond it. It is in fact ironically just because it is so mundane and so concrete that the Rule continues to speak so forcibly" (AP, p. xix). The very fact that St. Benedict pays so much attention to the details of ordinary life reinforces the Christian truth that we become holy through the ordinary, not by escape from the sometimes wearisome demands of daily life. "To become fully human in this life as it has been given us is to allow the sacredness of the ordinary to become manifest. To seek God in work, cooking, prayer, community, greeting strangers, and dealing with possessions is to enter into the mystery of the incarnation" (SEL, p. 13).

Although many practical details of the Rule may seem harsh to the modern reader, they embodied a spirit of great moderation in St. Benedict's day. In fact, St. Benedict has been known as a master of moderation, and the Rule has often been praised for its promotion of sensible moderation. This "moderation" entails an avoidance of extremes of too much or too little in such realms as food and clothing, personal asceticism, communal discipline, time spent on prayer, and quantity and rigor of work. Such moderation does not imply mediocrity; on the contrary, maintaining moderation in the details of everyday living was meant to foster a radical commitment to seek Christ in the most intense way. From his experience St. Benedict learned that various extremes do not dispose a monk (or anyone) for spiritual growth whereas moderation can open the way for each individual to become, to his maximum capacity, a whole, integrated, holy, self-giving disciple of Christ. Furthermore, moderation is a natural outgrowth of charity; love for others requires that we not impose on all members of a group the rigid standards that only a select few can fulfill. In the same way, each Oblate is called to find a balanced, moderate discipline of daily life that can open his or her heart to expand as fully as possible in the love of Christ.

Although the concrete practices of the Rule may, in many cases, no longer apply to today's monk or Oblate, the values expressed in the particulars of sixth-century Benedictine life are of critical value today. Hospitality, reverence for God's creation, balance in daily life, patient allowance for human limitations, prayerfulness in all activities, the sacredness of the meal, the need for good order, and the struggle against greed, for example, are no less essential for 21st-century Christian life than for monastic life in St. Benedict's time. Esther de Waal reflects that the Rule "enables me to seek God here and now, just as I am, caught up in all the absurdly down-to-earth chores and demands which I feel trap me day by day. ... It asks of me ... that I do the most ordinary, often dreary and humdrum things that face me each day with a loving openness that will allow them to become my own immediate way to God" (SG, pp. 104-105). In particular, material things can become channels of deeper faith if properly regarded. "Oblates must see everything they possess as gifts and blessings from God, to be used only for proper ends. The vices of avarice and excessive attachment must be excluded. ... Benedict never looks upon material things as evil in

themselves, but only warns against the excessive craving for them and against their improper use" (MBO, p. 46).

#### **4.7 Living in Community: Seeking God in and through Dealings with People**

Chapters 21 through 72 of the Rule state that we become holy not only through the ordinary events of each day but also in our day-to-day dealings with other people -- people who are flawed and annoying as well as gifted and supportive. Our journey to God cannot be made in isolation but takes place amidst the ups and downs of a life deeply involved in family and community. "Benedict wanted to establish clear principles for Christian community living, the same principles found in the Gospels and exemplified by the early Christian communities" (MBO, p. 30). Oblates can apply these values to their relationships in family, parish, universal Church, and society. St. Benedict's warnings that those in authority seek first the Kingdom, his call for special sensitivity to the sick and the poor, his mechanisms for dealing with irresponsible behavior, his persistent appeals for forgiveness and healing, his generous tolerance for human weaknesses, and his insistence on mutual love among old and young all have their counterparts in an Oblate's relationships with family and broader communities. The Rule's concern for each individual as an image of Christ and for the individual's growth in holiness contrasts with our current culture's imbalanced extremes of individualism, on the one hand, and mindless conformity, on the other hand. In Benedictine life each individual is valued precisely because one encounters Christ in that person.

The Rule "is pervaded with the idea of sacramental encounter with Christ in the circumstances of daily life and in material things, but most particularly in people. ... Endlessly the Rule makes room for each individual to grow in holiness at his or her own speed, in his or her own way. ... It is in the sections [of the Rule] that might at first seem most dated, the instructions to the servers, the cellarer, the door-keeper and so on, that in fact we can see this most clearly. ... [St. Benedict] shows how the well-organized community life makes possible the growth of the individual" (SG, pp. 115-116). At the same time, the individual is encouraged to grow not for his or her own sake but in the life of Christ that makes the person less self-centered and more capable of serving others in love. Despite its many limitations a community "mediates to me the power and the presence of God. This is the community in which God has placed me, and here I can always, in every situation, find the link of love that connects me with God" (Charles Cummings, O.C.S.O., *Monastic Practices*, p. 147). This Christ-centered balance of concern for individuals and bonding in communal relationships is highlighted in RB 71-72, in which all are called to mutual obedience and to the "good zeal" in which the monks "should each try to be the first to show respect to the other, supporting with the greatest patience one another's weaknesses of body or behavior. ... No one is to pursue what he judges better for

himself, but instead, what he judges better for someone else" (RB 72: 4,6). Thus monks and Oblates learn in community to "prefer nothing whatever to Christ" so that He may "bring us all together to everlasting life" (RB 72: 11,12).

## 5. SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

[\*Saint Benedict of Nursia, the first Benedictine monastery of Subiaco and the Holy Rule\*](#)

[\*Living The Rule\*](#)

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC, #946), United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1994.

Louis De Wohl, *Citadel of God: a Novel about Saint Benedict* (London: Sheed & Ward 1937, reprinted 1986).

Fr. Dwight Longenecker, *St. Benedict and St. Thérèse: The Little Rule and the Little Way* (Our Sunday Visitor).

Wil Derkse, *The Rule of Benedict for Beginners* (Liturgical Press)

Pope St. Gregory the Great, *Life and Miracles of St. Benedict* (Liturgical Press)

Abbot Jerome Kodell, O.S.B., *Life Lessons from the Monastery* (The Word Among Us)

<https://westminsterabbey.ca/benedictine-monasticism/st-benedict/>

## 6. REFLECTION QUESTIONS

This [link](#) provides an opportunity to share your responses to a few questions after you have read, reflected on and prayed over a lesson's topic. (It is not required to provide answers to the questions but Oblate Novices are encouraged to do so.)

### **Oblates & Genuine Conversion**

This section contains two factual questions; all answers are found in that lesson or pertain to it.

- 1. Who was St. Benedict? When and where did he live?**
- 2. Why did St. Benedict write the *Rule*? For whom did he write his *Rule*? Who uses the *Rule* today as a path to holiness? What is its value?**

### **Personal Conversion of Life**

This section contains your choice of one reflection question. Please reply to one of the following three questions (though you are welcome to reply to more than one, if you wish):

3. **Do you feel that you would benefit from a more balanced life of prayer and work? Why?**
4. **How could St. Benedict's book of practical wisdom be relevant to your life today?**
5. **In what ways do you see the Benedictine community of monks and Oblates and a regimen of following the wisdom in the Rule as an opportunity to live in strong discipleship with Christ?**

## **APPENDIX 2– Additional Optional References for Lesson 2**

### FULL TEXTS OF SCRIPTURE AND *RULE* VERSES

(This section provides more passages from the Old and New Testament and the Holy Rule. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

#### **Old Testament Scripture**

**Gen 28:3** “May God Almighty bless you and make you fertile, multiply you that you may become an assembly of peoples.”

**Dt 5:1-21** “Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and ordinances which I proclaim in your hearing this day, that you may learn them and take care to observe them....”

**Ps 1:1-2** “Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in company with scoffers. Rather, the law of the LORD is his joy; and on his law he meditates day and night.”

**Ps 16:11** “You will show me the path to life, abounding joy in your presence, the delights at your right hand forever.”

**Ps 40:7-9** “Sacrifice and offering you do not want; you opened my ears. Holocaust and sin-offering you do not request; so I said, ‘See; I come with an inscribed scroll written upon me. I delight to do your will, my God; your law is in my inner being!’”

**Ps 45:11** “Listen, my daughter, and understand; pay me careful heed.”

**Ps 119:97-98** “How I love your law, Lord! I study it all day long. Your commandment makes me wiser than my foes, as it is forever with me.”

**Ps 133:1** “How good and how pleasant it is, when brothers dwell together as one!”

**Is 2:2-3** “In the days to come, the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established as the highest mountain and raised above the hills. All nations shall stream toward it; many peoples shall come and say: ‘Come let us go up to the LORD’S mountain, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may instruct us in his ways, and we may walk in his paths.’”

**Jer 31:33** “But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days – oracle of the LORD. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

### **New Testament Scripture**

**Mt 5: 2-12 (The Beatitudes)** “He began to teach them, saying: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven...’”

**Mt 6:24** “No one can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

**Mt 18:20** “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

**Jn 17:11** “And now I will no longer be in the world, but they are in the world, while I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one just as we are.”

**Acts 2: 42** “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.”

**Acts 4:32** “The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common.”

**Rom 12:10** “...love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor.”

**Rom 15:5-6** “May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to think in harmony with one another, in keeping with Christ Jesus, that with one accord you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**Eph 4:1-6** “...urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace: one body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”

**Eph 4:15-16** “Rather, living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body’s growth and builds itself up in love.”

**Heb 10:24-25** “We must consider how to rouse one another to love and good works. We should not stay away from our assembly, as is the custom of some, but encourage one another, and this all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

**2 Pt 1:10-11** “Therefore, brothers, be all the more eager to make your call and election firm, for, in doing so, you will never stumble. For, in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ will be richly promised for you.”

**1 Jn 1:7** “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, then we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of his Son Jesus cleanses us from all sin.”

**1 Jn 3:23-24** “And his commandment is this: we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us. Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them, and the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit that he gave us.”

### **The Rule of St. Benedict**

**RB Prol: 1-3** “Listen carefully, my son, to the master’s instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is the advice from a father who loves you; welcome it, and faithfully put it into practice. 2 The labor of obedience will bring you back to him from whom you had drifted through the sloth of disobedience. 3 This message of mine is for you, then, if you are ready to give up your own will, once and for all, and armed with the strong and noble weapons of obedience to do battle for the true King, Christ the Lord.”

**RB Prol:49** “But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love.”

**RB 63:17** “In this way, they do what the words of Scripture say: ‘They should each try to be the first to show respect to the other’ (Rom 12:10).”

**RB 73:1, 8** Observance of this rule allows for some degree of virtue and the beginnings of monastic life. “Are you hastening to your heavenly home? Then with Christ’s help, keep this little rule that we have written for beginners.

## Lesson 3: Conversion of Heart

### INTRODUCTION

Pax!

May you find Christ's peace in your life with a right balance and a healthy rhythm of prayer and work, with the prayerful reading of Scripture and the Rule, with the study of lessons, with silent listening to God, and with your association with the Benedictine community of monks and affiliated Oblates.

At this point in time, consideration has been given to the seeking of holiness as found in Benedictine spirituality along with an introduction to the life of St. Benedict and his Rule. This lesson follows as the first of three which detail the promises of Benedictine Oblate life: conversion of heart, obedience, and stability. For us to continue to grow in holiness, we must remain open to accept changes in our lives that allow us to turn more fully to God. Each time we experience a conversion of heart, we become more like Christ as we continue our journey in seeking eternal life with Him.

*Lesson Three* will consider the turning of our hearts to God, so that we progress and begin to “run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love” and so that “we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom. Amen” (RB Prol: 49-50).

### 1. PRAYER

(This section provides the prayer that is prayed every night at the beginning of Vigils in our monastery along with Old and New Testament passages. There are more passages at the end of this document. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

*Come, O Holy Spirit, replenish the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your divine love.*

*Excite, O Lord, in your Church, the Spirit which our Most Holy Father, St. Benedict served; that filled with the same, we may study to love what he loved and practice what he taught. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*“A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit” (Ps 51:12).*

### 1.1 Old Testament Scripture

“I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the LORD. They shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.” (Jer 24:7)

### 1.2 New Testament Scripture

“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments.’” (Mt 22:36-40 [Dt 6:4-9, Mk 12:30-31, Lk 10:27]).

### 1.3 The Rule of St. Benedict

“And indeed the Lord assures us in his love: *I do not wish the death of the sinner but that he turn back to me and live.*” (RB Prol:38)

*Behold, now is the acceptable time, now is the day of salvation. In these days, then, let us commend ourselves as servants of God: in great patience, in abstinence, in wakefulness, and in charity unfeigned.* (Magnificat Antiphon, 1st Sunday of Lent)

## 2. READINGS

*Conversion opens the door for us to begin to run on the “path of God’s commandments” so that we may reach our heavenly home (RB Prol: 49-50).*

### 2.1 Heart of Benedictine Monastic Life

In his *Rule* St. Benedict prescribes three vows for his monks: stability, fidelity to monastic life, and obedience (RB 58: 17). Oblates do not take vows, but instead promise to live in accord with these same three monastic values. At the heart of the monastic’s life is fidelity, the promise of conversion, “*conversatio morum.*” Conversion is the explicit commitment to trust God in all things and at all times. It is a promise to keep turning toward God and to keep turning away from anything that is not of the Gospel. Conversion also involves a rejection of living in the past and avoidance of excessive concern about the future. It involves a willingness to be open to God’s plan for us in the present, and an eagerness to trust in God’s abiding faithfulness to us in all of life’s circumstances.

“*Conversion to Christ, the new birth of Baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Body and Blood of Christ received as food have made us ‘holy and without blemish,’ just as*

the Church herself, the Bride of Christ, is 'holy and without blemish' (Eph 1:4; 5:27). Nevertheless the new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weaknesses of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls *concupiscence*, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life. This is the struggle of *conversion* directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us" (CCC, #1426, with references to Council of Trent 1546-1547 and *Lumen Gentium*, 40).

## 2.2 Conversion is Linked to Faith

Conversion is closely linked to faith. Faith is often thought of as being a matter of the mind and an intellectual assent to the truths that the Church presents to us. That is one aspect of faith. However, faith as expressed in the Bible is a total surrender of self to God and to His will in our lives. In choosing to be an Oblate, we choose certain values which prioritize the deepening of our relationship with God by desiring a more personal relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ. Our faith provides a way for us to deepen this relationship and to experience conversion, so that we become more intimately aware of God and His Love for us through Jesus Christ, His Son. Conversion allows us to follow Christ in the spirit of the Gospel and to live out our baptismal promises. It is important to realize that conversion is not a one-time event but a continuous turning, and returning, to God. It is a process of transformation and sanctification, so that through our relationship with Christ we become holier and come to know the love and mercy of the Father.

The famous Scriptural parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) shows the father going out daily, waiting, longing and hoping for his beloved son, who has squandered his portion of the estate and chosen a sinful life, to return home. Finally, the son comes to his senses, returns home, and asks his father for forgiveness. The father greets his son with much love and calls for a banquet for all to rejoice in this homecoming. The important point of this story is that before the son asked for his father's forgiveness, the father had already forgiven him. This is a story of conversion, of a son turning to his father in the worst of circumstances. Our story is the same. We are never "not-forgiven." We only need to realize our Father's constant love for us and to anticipate the loving welcome that awaits us.

## 2.3 True Conversion Requires Humility

St. Benedict's focus on humility (*RB* Chapter 7) shows that he realized that humility is needed for genuine conversion of heart. Our lives reflect the prodigal son's life when we choose to be self-sufficient and feel no need for God. When we turn away from God

and choose the path of self-reliance, we set ourselves up for failure. Conversion means “returning home,” fully entrusting ourselves to God and to His Will in our lives. This choice can be frightening when we realize that means opening ourselves to the unknown, opening ourselves to the possibility of the need to change, and realizing that God may ask anything of us. We would feel so much more secure if we could follow clear “black-and-white” rules that can be reviewed and by which we can be graded as if our life was found on an accountant’s ledger. However, in conversion we are asked to listen to God and to freely respond to Him as He speaks in the depths of our hearts, in the midst of dynamic human relationships, and through unexpected and ever-changing events and challenges. We need to remain open to His abiding love and mercy, and when we fail in this and lose our way, we need to return home to God our Father, who waits for our “homecoming.”

Since conversion is based on relationship, it also is evidenced within the Church, the Body of Christ. One example can be found in various reactions to the Second Vatican Council, which ended in 1965. When the Church began to revise liturgical customs and regulations, some welcomed the changes, while others, who had become very comfortable with the pre-Vatican II Church, became afraid. While remaining faithful to Scripture and Tradition, the Church asked us to be willing to let go of some elements that had been bearers of God’s grace to us in a certain period in history. The Church asked us to accept a spirit of conversion so that the Holy Spirit could speak to the world in ways that could be heard best in our current age. In the early Church St. Paul’s words encouraged all to be ready, to move on: “Brothers, I for my part do not consider myself to have taken possession. Just one thing: forgetting what lies behind but straining forward to what lies ahead, I continue my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God’s upward calling, in Christ Jesus” (Phil 3:13-14). Paul is telling us that we should not rely on our own human wisdom and limited strength, but rather trust in God’s abiding fidelity, His wisdom, and the work of the Holy Spirit. God has never broken a promise.

The *Rule* of St. Benedict warns us against pride, and in the “twelve degrees of humility” calls us to greater awareness and restraint. Conversion asks us to make the effort to become more aware of God at work in our lives. If we become more aware of God’s work in our lives, we are less likely to be overwhelmed by other things. Conversion also requires restraint so that we may begin to overcome the big or little addictions that beset us, along with any compulsiveness that interferes with our relationships with God and with others.

Conversion is the “Lent and Easter struggle,” which asks us to die to our vanities and desires, so that we may surrender ourselves totally to God. Conversion also involves patience so that we are able to wait, able to not judge too quickly, and able to accept things that we cannot change. The “lost” energy used to protect ourselves is able to be

transformed into a “fruitful” energy that reaches out to others. The process of conversion strips away, layer by layer, the illusions that separate us from the reality of God’s presence in our lives. As we grow spiritually, comparisons and competitiveness with others decrease, because we instead focus on God rather than focusing on others. We begin to see our worth in Him. If we accept the challenge of being open to conversion, calm replaces our fear of silence, and our heart expands to listen more fully to God so that we may follow His will, share in His kingdom, and reach our heavenly home.

#### **2.4 Other Aspects of Benedictine *Conversatio Morum***

By *conversatio morum* Oblates make use of all means at their disposal to welcome God's grace to purify and transform them. Just as the monk's corresponding vow commits him "to grow in perfect charity through a monastic manner of life," so the Oblate promises to surrender more and more of his or her life to Christ amidst daily vicissitudes; thus every moment becomes an opportunity for firmer rejection of self-will and deeper abiding in the love of Christ.

Other values in the *Rule* include silence, humility, peace, "glorifying God in all things," and community. Living in a noisy and unfocused world, Oblates nurture both external and internal silence as a necessary condition for hearing the call of God and responding to Him. Humility involves both an honest admission of one's own limitations, weaknesses, and sinfulness, and also a reverent mindfulness of God's greatness, expressed most fully in the all-forgiving love of Jesus Christ.

"Pax," the peace of Christ which is meant to pervade every aspect of Christian life, has become a Benedictine motto; thus Oblates seek to dwell with peace in their hearts, to work for healing and reconciliation within family and community, and to join with other peacemakers to bring about a world of peace and justice.

"Glorifying God" (RB 57:9) means living in Christ and bringing out God's goodness in every person and situation; it means nurturing hope-filled attitudes; it means avoiding murmuring, gossip, and all that destroys or tears down what should rather be healed and redeemed. Since the whole *Rule* is written in the context of community, Oblates necessarily live in a spirit of community; even if living alone, they strive to nurture loving communion with others who seek God in Christ and ultimately with all people. Oblates show high respect for family life and community life as essential vehicles for transmitting life in Christ.

Benedictine spirituality also summons monks and Oblates to reverence, devotion to the Eucharist, praying of the Liturgy of the Hours, hospitality, special concern for the poor

and underprivileged, stewardship for God's creation, and prophetic witness. Oblates develop an attentiveness to the Word of God wherever and however it may speak to them, but especially in the practice of *lectio divina*, a slow, gentle savoring of the words of the Bible.

Oblates also treasure the living presence of Christ in liturgy, particularly in the Holy Eucharist. They seek to sanctify all the hours of the day by praying some part of the Liturgy of Hours, or "Divine Office," in union with the monks of the Archabbey. This prayer of the Church is meant to extend the effects of the Eucharist to all moments. Just as they come to find Christ in the Eucharist and in Scripture, Oblates likewise learn to welcome Christ in the stranger, as well as in all guests, as an act of faith.

This hospitality will overflow to a heartfelt concern for all those in whom Christ suffers — the poor and oppressed of one's neighborhood and the world. The *Rule* challenges Benedictines to regard all material things "as sacred vessels of the altar" (RB 31:12), and so Oblates nurture an informed care for the environment as a gift of God to be shared by all people. Finally, just as the monks of Saint Benedict's time witnessed to Christian values that were often contrary to the norms of their society, so also today's monks and Oblates have a prophetic vocation to proclaim the primacy of God and the sacredness of all life in a world that is often deluded by self-centered, materialistic concerns.

### 3. SUMMARY

*Conversion opens the door for us to begin to run on the "path of God's commandments" so that we may reach our heavenly home (RB Prol: 49-50).*

#### 3.1 Heart of Benedictine Monastic Life

- A. The three vows (Oblate promises) are stability, fidelity to monastic life (conversion), and obedience.
- B. Conversion (*conversatio morum*)
  - ongoing, continuous turning and returning to God
  - trusting God in all circumstances of life
  - rejecting pride and anything that is not of the Gospel
  - living in the present: not being locked in the past, or excessively concerned about the future
  - eagerness to trust in God's abiding faithfulness to us in all of life's circumstances.

- “*Conversion* to Christ, the new birth of Baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Body and Blood of Christ received as food have made us ‘holy and without blemish,’ just as the Church herself, the Bride of Christ, is ‘holy and without blemish’ (Eph 1:4; 5:27). Nevertheless the new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weaknesses of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls *concupiscence*, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life. This is the struggle of *conversion* directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us” (CCC, #1426, with references to Council of Trent 1546-1547 and *Lumen Gentium*, 40).

### **3.2 Conversion is Linked to Faith**

- A. an intellectual assent as well as a deepening of our relationship with Christ
- B. being open to the work of the Holy Spirit in transforming and sanctifying us
- C. surrendering to God the Father
- D. living our Baptismal promises

### **3.3 True Conversion Requires Humility**

- A. fear of God and trust in His love and mercy; abandoning self-sufficiency and self-reliance
- B. confessing sins humbly; recognizing our limitations and weaknesses
- C. keeping God’s commandments; allowing for personal change and acceptance of the unknown
- D. submitting to superiors in all obedience for the love of God; giving honor to others first
- E. being content with our given life situation; doing only what is endorsed by common rule and example
- F. embracing suffering quietly, enduring it without weakening
- G. controlling our speech; valuing silence and knowing when to speak
- H. speaking gently, briefly, reasonably, without unnecessary laughter
- I. nurturing humility in our hearts and manifesting humility in our bearing
- J. being aware of God’s presence and freely responding to Him who speaks in our hearts, in people, and in circumstances
- K. realizing that we are “stalled,” sinful creatures, who are not divine (Fr. Michael Casey, O.C.S.O.)

- L. parable of prodigal son coming home (Luke 15:11-32) M. St. Benedict's "Twelve Degrees of Humility" leading us to our heavenly home (RB Chapter 7)

### **3.4 Other Aspects of Benedictine *Conversatio Morum***

- A. firmer rejection of self-will and a deeper abiding in the love of Christ
- B. seeing external and internal silence as necessary for hearing the call of God and responding to Him
- C. nurturing loving communion with others; focus on healing and reconciliation, peace and justice
- D. reverence and devotion to the Eucharist, the praying of Liturgy of the Hours, lectio divina
- E. hospitality in welcoming all as Christ; caring for all material things as "sacred vessels of the altar" (RB 31.12); and care for our environment

## **4. SUPPLEMENTARY READING**

### **4.1 Benedictine Values for Oblates**

Just as the monk takes these three vows at the time of profession, so does the Oblate implicitly promise at the time of Oblation to live by these values through the commitment to "dedicate myself to the service of God and neighbor according to the Rule of St. Benedict" (Oblation ceremony). These promises of Oblation, while not binding under pain of sin, should be taken seriously as part of a carefully discerned lifelong commitment.

### **4.2 Ongoing Conversion**

Oblates make use of means at their disposal to let God's grace transform them more and more -- spiritually, intellectually, culturally, and socially. Such means might include making retreats, days of recollection, or parish renewals or attending workshops, seminars, or prayer meetings that enrich one's faith. Just as a monk's vow of *conversatio morum* commits him to "grow in perfect charity through a monastic manner of life" (formula for the monk's vows), the Oblate promises to keep trying to seek Christ in the midst of ordinary events so that every moment becomes an opportunity for deeper trust in God, firmer rejection of self-will, and more generous surrender to Christ as He stretches us in His self-sacrificing, all-generous love.

A helpful analysis of the term *conversatio morum* appears in *The Benedictines*, pp. 94-98. There Fr. Terrence Kardong shows how it implies a "dynamic process." The term

"morum" probably does not at all refer to "morals" but simply reinforces *conversatio*. The two words together may be taken to mean the whole "monastic way of life," but in its traditional usage the term refers mainly to the external, tangible elements of that life. Therefore, commitment to *conversatio morum* encourages the monk or Oblate to put the Gospel into practice in the very concrete details of everyday life and also to be open continually to new concrete practices that radical discipleship may demand.

### 4.3 Peace

In the Prologue of the Rule, St. Benedict urges us to "let peace be your quest and aim (Ps 34:15)" (Prol:17). "Pax" has become a Benedictine motto. Thus Oblates are women and men of peace, as they seek to dwell with peace in their hearts, to work for healing and reconciliation within family and community, and to join with other peacemakers to bring about a world of peace and justice. The Rule speaks to ordinary people who experience tension and conflict with others, and as such, it offers guidelines for an ongoing healing of relationships that nurtures a continual abiding in the peace of Christ and that springs from that inner peace.

## 5. SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

[Crisis Converted: A Benedictine Guide to Hope - CONVERSION](#)

[Stability & Conversion in the Benedictine Charism | Mother Noella Marcellino](#)

<https://vimeo.com/730424873>

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC, #946 #821, #1425-1430, #1999-2000), United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1994.

Michael Casey, O.C.S.O., *Strangers to the City*, Paraclete Press, 2008

Christopher Jamison, O.S.B., *Finding Happiness*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2021

## 6. REFLECTION QUESTIONS

This [link](#) provides an opportunity to share your responses to a few questions after you have read, reflected on and prayed over a lesson's topic. (It is not required to provide answers to the questions but Oblate Novices are encouraged to do so.)

### Oblates & Genuine Conversion

This section contains two factual questions; all answers are found in that lesson or pertain to it.

1. **What are the three Benedictine promises that Oblates make at the time of their final Oblation? Why is humility required for conversion?**
2. **What does conversion of heart (*conversatio morum*) mean? How does a genuine conversion of heart affect us and others?**

### **Personal Conversion of Life**

This section contains your choice of one reflection question. Please reply to one of the following three questions (though you are welcome to reply to more than one, if you wish):

3. **Which Biblical conversion story means the most to you? How has that story affected your life? Have you ever had the opportunity to share some of your personal ongoing conversion with another person?**
4. **In what situations do you find it easy to trust in God’s abiding love and mercy? In what situations do you find it difficult to trust in God’s abiding love and mercy? Do you now see new ways that could help you increase your faith, your trust in God?**
5. **As we try to surrender ourselves to God, where do you find that you receive the necessary encouragements and graces? Do you now see new ways in which you could seek the Lord’s help?**

### **APPENDIX 3– Additional Optional References for Lesson 3**

#### **FULL TEXTS OF SCRIPTURE AND *RULE* VERSES**

(This section provides more passages from the Old and New Testament and the Holy Rule. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

#### **Old Testament Scripture**

**Nm 6:24-26** “The LORD bless you and keep you! The LORD let his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you! The LORD look upon you kindly and give you peace!”

**1 Sm 10:9** “As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed his heart. That very day all these signs came to pass....”

**1 Kgs 18:37** “Answer me, LORD! Answer me, that this people may know that you, LORD, are God and that you have turned their hearts back to you.”

**Ps 51: 7-9** “Behold, I was born in guilt, in sin my mother conceived me. Behold, you desire true sincerity; and secretly you teach me wisdom. Cleanse me with hyssop, that I may be pure; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.”

**Ps 51:11-13** “Turn away your face from my sins; blot out all my iniquities. A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit. Do not drive me from before your face, nor take from me your holy spirit.”

**Ps 67:2-3** “May God be gracious to us and bless us; may his face shine upon us. So shall your way be known upon the earth, your victory among all the nations.”

**Ps 68:21** “Our God is a God who saves; escape from death is the LORD God’s.”

**Ps 80:20** “LORD God of hosts, restore us; light up your face and we shall be saved.”

**Ps 89: 2, 34-36** “I will sing of your mercy forever, LORD proclaim your faithfulness through all ages. But I will not take my mercy from him, nor will I betray my bond of faithfulness. I will not violate my covenant; the promise of my lips I will not alter. By my holiness I swore once for all: I will never be false to David.”

**Ps 143:4-8** “My spirit is faint within me; my heart despairs. I remember the days of old; I ponder all your deeds; the works of your hands I recall. I stretch out my hands toward you, my soul to you like a parched land. Hasten to answer me, LORD; for my spirit fails me. Do not hide your face from me, lest I become like those descending to the pit. In the morning let me hear of your mercy, for in you I trust. Show me the path I should walk, for I entrust my life to you.”

**Is 49:6** “It is too little, he says, for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the survivors of Israel; I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”

**Jer 3:18-19** “In those days the house of Judah will walk alongside the house of Israel; together they will come from the land of the north to the land which I gave your ancestors as a heritage. I thought: How I would like to make you my children! So I gave you a pleasant land, the most beautiful heritage among the nations! You would call me, ‘My Father,’ I thought, and you would never turn away from me.”

**Ez 33:11** “Answer them: As I live- oracle of the Lord GOD - I swear I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! Why should you die, house of Israel?”

**Ez 36:25-28** “I will sprinkle clean water over you to make you clean; from all your impurities and from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart, and a

new spirit I will put within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you so that you walk in my statutes, observe my ordinances, and keep them. You will live in the land I gave to your ancestors; you will be my people, and I will be your God.”

**Joel 2:12-13** “Yet even now – oracle of the LORD - return to me with your whole heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to the LORD, your God. For he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting in punishment.”

### **New Testament Scripture**

**Mt 6:21** “For where your treasure is, there also will your heart be.”

**Lk 15:11-32** These verses contain the parable of the Prodigal Son.

**Lk 18:10-14** “Two people went up to the temple area to pray; one was a Pharisee and the other was a tax collector. The Pharisee took up his position and spoke this prayer to himself, ‘O God, I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity—greedy, dishonest, adulterous—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income.’ But the tax collector stood off at a distance and would not even raise his eyes to heaven but beat his breast and prayed, ‘O God, be merciful to me a sinner.’ I tell you, the latter went home justified, not the former; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

**Acts 2:40-41** “He testified with many other arguments, and was exhorting them, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand persons were added that day.”

**Acts 3:25-26** “You are the children of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your ancestors when he said to Abraham, ‘In your offspring all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ For you first, God raised up his servant and sent him to bless you by turning each of you from your evil ways.”

**Acts 4:4,32** “But many of those who heard the word came to believe and (the) number of men grew to [about] five thousand. The community of believers was of one heart and mind, and no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they had everything in common.”

**Acts 8:26-39** These verses contain the story of Philip and the Ethiopian’s conversion.

**Acts 9:1-22** These verses contain the story of Saul’s conversion.

**Acts 15:16-17** “After this I shall return and rebuild the fallen hut of David; from its ruins I shall rebuild it and raise it up again, so that the rest of humanity may seek out the Lord, even all the Gentiles on whom my name is invoked.”

**Rom 12:1-2** “I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.”

**Eph 2:11-18** “Therefore, remember that at one time you, Gentiles in the flesh, called the uncircumcision by those called the circumcision, which is done in the flesh by human hands, were at that time without Christ, alienated from the community of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have become near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, he who made both one and broke down the dividing wall of enmity, through his flesh, abolishing the law with its commandments and legal claims, that he might create in himself one new person in place of the two, thus establishing peace, and might reconcile both with God, in one body, through the cross, putting that enmity to death by it. He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, for through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.”

**Col 3:1** “If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.”

### **The Rule of St. Benedict**

**RB Prol: 45-50** Here St. Benedict explains that amending faults and safeguarding love will result in our hearts overflowing with inexpressible delight as we run on the path of God’s commandments.

**RB 1** In this chapter St. Benedict describes the kinds of monks who have held fast to monastic values and those who have not.

**RB 4:1-2** “First of all, *love the Lord God with your whole heart, your whole soul and all your strength, and love your neighbor as yourself.*” This chapter lists in detail the “tools of good works” necessary for a Holy monastic life.

**RB 7: 1-9** In our desire to reach heaven, we ascend by following the steps of humility and discipline. We descend by exalting ourselves.

**RB 21:1** In large communities brothers exhibiting a holy life assume a greater level of authority.

**RB 31:12** Reverence and stewardship are called for in handling the goods of the monastery, according to the abbot's orders.

**RB 58:1, 17** The monastic way is not easy but is supported by the promises of stability, fidelity to monastic life (conversion), and obedience.

**RB 63:1** Monastic rank is determined according to the date of entry, the monk's virtue, and the abbot's decision.

**RB 73:1-2** The *Rule* is to be used in community so that virtue may be nurtured and so that monastic life may have a fruitful beginning – and then lead to “loftier summits.”

## Lesson 4: Obedience

### INTRODUCTION

Pax!

May you find Christ's peace in your life with a right balance and a healthy rhythm of prayer and work, with the prayerful reading of Scripture and the Rule, with the study of lessons, with silent listening to God, and with your association with the Benedictine community of monks and affiliated Oblates.

The past three lessons have given you a taste of Benedictine spirituality. This next lesson will present the second Oblate promise of obedience and offers a vast range of references from Scripture and from the Rule. Obedience is one of the hardest promises because of the self-centered tendencies of our society. May this lesson provide encouragement for you!

*Lesson Four* considers the promise of obedience, which is the expression of a genuine conversion of heart.

### 1. PRAYER

(This section provides the prayer that is prayed every night at the beginning of Vigils in our monastery along with Old and New Testament passages. There are more passages at the end of this document. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

*Come, O Holy Spirit, replenish the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your divine love.*

*Excite, O Lord, in your Church, the Spirit which our Most Holy Father, St. Benedict served; that filled with the same, we may study to love what he loved and practice what he taught. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*"A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit" (Ps 51:12).*

#### 1.1 Old Testament Scripture

"But Samuel said: 'Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obedience to the LORD's command? Obedience is better than sacrifice, to listen, better than the fat of rams'" (1 Sm 15:22).

## 1.2 New Testament Scripture

“Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:5-11).

## 1.3 The Rule of St. Benedict

“And indeed the Lord assures us in his love: *I do not wish the death of the sinner but that he turn back to me and live.*” (RB Prol:38)

## 2. READINGS

*The Benedictine promise of obedience, of listening to God in the midst of everyday life and making choices that follow His will, is the expression of a genuine conversion of heart.*

### 2.1 Unhesitating Obedience

“The first step of humility is unhesitating obedience, which comes naturally to those who cherish Christ above all” (RB 5:1-2). “To obey (from the Latin *ob-audire*, to ‘hear or listen to’) in faith is to submit freely to the word that has been heard, because its truth is guaranteed by God, who is Truth itself. Abraham is the model of such obedience offered us by Sacred Scripture. The Virgin Mary is its most perfect embodiment” (CCC, #144). In Chapter 7 of the *Rule* St. Benedict connects obedience with the humility of Christ and with His obedience to the Father’s will. Our call to obey the Father is an opportunity to express our love and gratitude to Christ and to imitate Him. Obedience to God’s will often means choosing what is better for another rather than what we desire for ourselves. This requires setting our priorities in proper order and being continually mindful of God. Those who practice obedience to God protect holiness in their lives and in the lives of others.

### 2.2 Our Impatient, Self-Centered Society

We live in the midst of an impatient society that urges us to find quick answers; it tempts us to place our focus on our personal satisfactions so that we applaud our own accomplishments. The idea of setting our will aside to follow God’s will seems to be an alien concept in such an environment. However, that very concept is the only one that

leads to eternal life. The *Rule* warns that “no one is to follow his own heart’s desire” (RB 3:8) but instead to go beyond the affairs of life to “listen carefully with the ear of your heart” (RB Prol:1).

### **2.3 Deceptive Obedience and Misuse of Authority**

At times we may find ourselves obeying not out of love but from a sense of responsibility or from fear. We may be tempted to view obedience as a managerial tool that is required to get a job done. It is good to recognize that people in authority may abuse their God-given privileges and demand our obedience so that they may manipulate or dominate us. Obedience to others should always be viewed in the light of God’s commandments, which are given to us in Christ’s love.

### **2.4 Freedom to Choose Obedience**

We are free to choose our obedience! We can trust that God’s call to obey Him leads us to more virtuous living and asks for our humility, not our humiliation. Obedience to God allows us to find the courage to avoid situations that may cause our anxiety. We can break free and learn to live in the way of the Spirit (Rom 7:6), to “begin to observe without effort, as though naturally from habit, no longer out of fear of hell, but out of love for Christ, good habit and delight in virtue” (RB 7:68-69).

### **2.5 Mutual Obedience**

Likewise, we need to exercise kindness and humility when we are placed in authority over others. The *Rule* speaks of *mutual obedience* that respects the balance of human relationships in community so that we may serve one another with the self-sacrificing love of Christ. This call to obedience requires the abbot to listen to the monks in his community before making a final decision (RB 3:1-2), and to have compassionate concern for those who stray from the path (RB 27:5). It asks the cellarer to avoid pride and to act without delay in providing for the brothers (RB 31:16) and challenges the porter to praise God for the blessing brought by a person’s arrival (RB 66:3-4). In the secular world, the virtue of obedience calls upon supervisors to be obedient to the needs of their employees and reminds parents to be obedient to the needs of their children. This obedience is based not on earned respect but on respect that is due to each person because of his or her God-given dignity.

### **2.6 Challenge of Living According to God’s Will**

Trying to live according to God’s will may involve a great challenge; it may cause us to feel anxious and rebellious at the very thought of setting aside our plans to take time to

ask God what HIS plans are for us. If we continue to make self-willed choices that set God aside, the peace of Christ in our hearts will gradually be destroyed and we will never “arrive at the perfect love of God which casts out fear (1 Jn 4:18)” [RB 7:67]. The *Rule* calls us to recognize that God is at work in all of the hardships and adversities of our lives and that He is asking for our trust so that He may lead us along the “narrow path” (Mt 7:14).

Self-centeredness constricts and hardens our hearts. It imprisons us so that our openness to hear God’s word and to act upon it is severely limited. The anxiety that this produces may become a huge obstacle that prevents Christ from entering our hearts and filling them with His love. It is good for us to remember the rich man who could not be receptive to Jesus’ invitation to become one of His disciples. Though he had obeyed and fulfilled the requirements of the law, he could not set aside his riches, which may have included a disordered desire to control, along with a focus on self-fulfillment and self exaltation to the disregard of God and of others. In choosing himself, he declined the greatest invitation to deepen his relationship with God (Mt 19:16-23), which would have brought him the greatest of joys.

## **2.7 Obedience during Trials**

In accomplishing our necessary daily tasks, we may encounter great trials. It is good for us to recognize these trials not apart from grace, but rather as offering opportunities for us, *by the grace of God*, to grow in holiness. To trust God in the midst of trying circumstances can be extremely difficult. We may begin to doubt that God is with us in the midst of our pain and confusion. But it is at those very times that we are called to the positive summons to deny ourselves, to receive His grace and to allow Him to guide us to peace of heart. If we open our hearts to His love, we will find that difficult tasks may become easier to bear. In time, we may find ourselves obeying His will with joy!

## **2.8 Obeying without Delay**

The *Rule* repeatedly reminds us of the importance of obeying without delay at every moment in all matters, whether large or small. We are called to overcome our self-centered anxieties so as to be free to obey instantly and to fulfill whatever God is asking of us. Obedience asks us to refrain from being “sluggish or half-hearted” in our efforts and to be “free from any grumbling or any reaction of unwillingness” (RB 5:14). Obedience places God first in our lives, as stated in Scripture: “Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, with your whole being, and with your whole strength (Dt 6:5; Mt 22:37; Mk 12:30-31; Lk 10:27).

Obedience in small matters is often the most difficult because we may view them as insignificant and without consequences. However, the Lord clearly states that we are to follow Him in even the smallest of things. Such radical submission brings us true freedom and increases the virtue of simplicity in our lives. It is crucial to realize that there are no quick fixes or shortcuts in setting the foundation for a vibrant spiritual life. Rather, conversion of heart involves a gradual process that leads us toward ever fuller obedience. Step by step, obedience quiets our hearts and brings greater freedom to listen and to follow God's call. When we place God first and act with loving attention and with gratitude to the Father, whose gifts surround us in every moment of our lives, we begin to "run on the path of God's commandments" (RB Prol: 49).

## **2.9 Obedience Linked to Ongoing Conversion**

Obedience calls us to cultivate a loving relationship with God so that our wills become more like His will. This demands humility and a struggle against our deeply rooted self-will with its former ways that may tempt us with the false sense of comfort and security. Our call to obedience includes a summons to change our disordered dispositions, such as murmuring or other self-centered impulses, and to seek repentance and to conform to Christ's wholehearted obedience to the Father. In this way, obedience is linked to ongoing conversion. We are invited to become ones who have "foiled the evil one" and have "caught hold of [temptations] and dashed them against Christ" (RB Prol: 28). Humility and obedience open us to the presence of Christ and offer the way to imitate Him. Lovingly obeying God's will at all times is at the heart of following Christ, who "though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather...he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:6-8).

Each of us has chosen, or is in the process of discerning, our vocation in life. In each particular state of life, we are equally commanded to obey God's will fully, though our following takes different forms based on our circumstances. These different settings affect how God's will touches our lives. Members of a monastic community place trust in their abbot or abbess; diocesan priests in their bishop; married couples in each other and in their family members; single persons in their church leaders and in family and loving friends. God's will is mediated in each of these settings, not with mechanical certainty, but with an obedience that listens to the other from the heart. In each vocation, there should be no isolated self-discernment of God's will but rather discernment that listens to God carefully in one's own heart and also seeks counsel.

Obedience to the Father cannot be something abstract or based on false hopes. It requires an acceptance of the reality of life without the illusions about good or evil. In humility, we need to look at ourselves to see both the good and the bad. In some cases,

we need to accept our true goodness rather than to think only of our weaknesses and failings. In other cases, it requires suffering borne in solidarity with Christ, which ultimately prepares our hearts to overflow “with the inexpressible delight of love” (RB Prol: 49).

## **2.10 Necessity of Discernment, Counsel, and Prayer**

Let Jesus Christ be our Teacher. In His life and death He overcame the pride that places man at the center of the world. Jesus’ obedience to the Father showed His humble acceptance of reality as He embraced His Cross. In following Christ, we need to accept the reality about ourselves and the life situations that have resulted from our choices. When making decisions, we need to pray and seek counsel better to understand God’s will in our lives based on our talents, charisms, and circumstances. Following God’s will does not mean that we need to figure out everything that God already knows or that we need to find the puzzle piece that fits an already designed picture. Seeking God’s will means that we make the most loving choices of which we are capable and use the help that God gives us. Each time that we make the right choice, our will is trained and strengthened so that when the next time comes to act in obedience to the Father, we shall be more ready for it. Obedience means being dependent on God, embracing suffering without escape, and entering into the heart of Christ. Our obedience to God is a participation in the obedience of Christ and in His sacrificial death, through which we come to know the glory of heaven.

Prayer strengthens us to keep God’s will as primary in our lives and to love God above all else so that, as our ultimate goal, we immediately act in obedience to Him in all circumstances and at all times. In the *Rule’s* precept about being summoned to prayer, the monk is challenged to be “ready to arise without delay when the signal is given” (RB 22:6). Each day will bring many opportunities to welcome God’s grace so that we may set aside our will and choose His will at that moment. Perhaps we are able to add Mass or more prayer to our day. Perhaps we can pause in the midst of our work to acknowledge another person; perhaps we can accept beneficial corrections from others; perhaps we can struggle against bad habits. All such practices are ways to respond obediently to Christ. God’s call to obedience takes flesh when He asks us to reach out in charity to others with exterior and interior peace and joy in Christ in the varying events of our daily life.

There is no separation between God’s will and God’s love. As our love for Christ deepens, our resistance to His will decreases, and our eagerness to follow Him increases. We can show our love for God by obeying His will in our chosen vocation and responding favorably to His call in the midst of ordinary tasks and through our interactions with others. Humility and obedience are ways to imitate Christ and to

discover Christ in another person's situation. We serve Christ Himself when we seek the good of others above our own good, when we place every moment in God's hands, and when we trust that every situation offers opportunities for patient trust and obedience. Let us be among those who "are ready to give up [our] own wills once and for all, and armed with the strong and noble weapons of obedience, to do battle for the true King, Christ the Lord" (RB Prol: 3).

### 3. SUMMARY

*The Benedictine promise of obedience, of listening to God in the midst of everyday life and of making choices that follow His will, is the expression of a genuine conversion of heart.*

#### 3.1 Unhesitating Obedience

- A. "Listen" is the first word of the Rule.
  - 1. "To obey (from the Latin *ob-audire*, to 'hear or listen to') in faith is to submit freely to the word that has been heard, because its truth is guaranteed by God, who is Truth itself" (CCC, #144).
  - 2. "Abraham is the model of such obedience offered us by Sacred Scripture" (CCC, #144).
  - 3. "The Virgin Mary is its most perfect embodiment" (CCC, #144).
  - 4. The *Rule* warns that no one is to follow his own desires.
  - 5. The *Rule* asks us to listen with the ear of our heart.
- I. Christ's humility was shown in obedience to the Father's will.
- J. Obedience is an opportunity for us to express love and gratitude to Christ.
- K. Obedience is a way to imitate Christ.
- L. Expressions of obedience for those who cherish Christ above all:
  - 1. Choose what is better for another than choosing self.
  - 2. Set priorities in proper order.
  - 3. Keep mindfulness of God.
  - 4. Protect holiness in self and in others.

#### 3.2 Our Impatient, Self-Centered Society

- A. It focuses on quick answers, personal satisfaction and achievements.
- M. God's will seems an alien concept, yet is the only one leading to eternal life.

#### 3.3 Deceptive Obedience and Misuse of Authority

- A. We may respond in obedience not out of love but only due to a sense of responsibility or due to fear of punishment.
- B. Some of those in authority abuse their God-given privilege.
  - 1. Some use authority as a managerial tool to get the job done.
  - 2. They demand obedience to manipulate or dominate.
  - 3. We may refuse to see authority in light of God's commandments and Christ's love.

### **3.4 Freedom to Choose Obedience**

- A. Trust in God's call to live a more virtuous life.
- B. Welcome the courage to avoid situations that cause anxiety.
- C. Live in the way of the Spirit.

### **3.5 Mutual Obedience**

- A. Kindness and humility are necessary.
- B. Obedience to others is not based on earned respect but on the God-given dignity of the human person.
- C. The Rule calls upon superiors to listen and to serve those under their authority.
  - 1. The abbot, cellarer, and porter are to listen with compassion to monks and guests.
  - 2. Religious leaders are to listen to their community members.
  - 3. Married couples are to listen to their spouses and family members.
  - 4. Single people are to listen to their communities and to abide by their rules.

### **3.6 Challenge of Living According to God's Will**

- A. Feelings of rebellion, anxiety and fear cause loss of peace.
- B. There may be difficulty in seeing God at work in every circumstance of life.
- C. Anxieties constrict and harden our hearts and severely limit our capacity to hear and to act on God's word.
- D. Riches of self-control, self-fulfillment and self-exaltation need to be surrendered in order for us to welcome Christ's invitation (See Mt 19:16-23).

### **3.7 Obedience during Trials**

- A. Trials do not exist apart from grace.
- B. Trials are opportunities to grow in holiness.

- C. Trials call us to deny ourselves, to receive God's grace, and to let this grace guide us to peace of heart.
- D. Joy is the result of obeying God and following His will for us.

### 3.8 Obeying without Delay

- A. We strive to obey at every moment and without delay in matters large or small.
- B. We strive to overcome self-centered anxieties by placing God first.
- C. We seek to refrain from sluggishness and half-heartedness.

### 3.9 Obedience Linked to Ongoing Conversion

- A. Conversion is not a matter of quick fixes but involves a gradual process for our wills to become more like God's will.
- B. This call to obedience is not abstract but is found in the reality of life.
- C. Christ is our Teacher in His accepting and embracing His Cross.
- D. The form of obedience is determined by our vocation.

### 3.10 Necessity of Discernment, Counsel, and Prayer

- A. We need to make loving choices by listening to God and by seeking counsel.
- B. We need to acknowledge dependence on God in all things.
- C. Prayer strengthens us to keep God's will first in our lives.
- D. There is no separation between God's will and God's love.
- E. The call to discern God's will applies to each day of our lives.
- F. Discernment helps us make the most loving choices of which we are capable and to use the help God gives us.

## 4. SUPPLEMENTARY READING

### 4.1 Benedictine Values for Oblates – Obedience

Oblates learn to listen to God's call always and everywhere through the regular study and meditative reading of Scripture, with special attention to the Gospels. Oblates also listen for God's voice in the Rule by frequent meditation on passages of the Rule and by efforts to apply the fruits of their meditation to their everyday lives.

In this way Oblates learn to seek God's will in every circumstance and to heed God's word above every selfish impulse and every other desire. The promise of obedience thus forms bonds of fidelity to Christ and to one's family and friends and deepens one's

responsibility to community, Church, and world. It is Christ who encounters Oblates through others, and Christ who works through Oblates in obedient, loving response to others' needs.

## 5. SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

### Books

Sister M. Dolores Dowling, O.S.B., “*Instructions for Benedictine Oblates*,” Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Tucson, AZ.

Daniel Rees and Other Members of the English Benedictine Congregation, *Consider Your Call: A Theology of Monastic Life Today* (Cistercian Studies Series), 1978. Tolbert McCarroll, “Humanizing Humility: RB 7: A Psychology of Spiritual Growth,” *Benedictines*, Fall- Winter 1980/81.

“Benedictine *Conversatio Morum*,” “The Rule,” [www.svaoblates.org](http://www.svaoblates.org)

Right Rev. Paul Delatte, O.S.B., *Rule of St. Benedict: A Commentary*, translated by Dom Justin McCann, Forgotten Books, 2012 (Originally published by Burns, Oates & Washbourne, Ltd., London, 1921).

Fr. Donald S. Raila, O.S.B., *Lessons from Saint Benedict: Finding Joy in Daily Life*, Sacred Winds Press, 2011 [also, A Study Guide to... (2013)].

Fr. Donald S. Raila, O.S.B., editor, *The Rule in Bits and Pieces with Contributions from the Monks and Oblates of Saint Vincent Archabbey*, Sacred Winds Press, Saint Louis, Missouri, 2014.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC, pp. 889-890; #144, #1897), United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1994. (Also available online from United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [www.ccc.usccb.org](http://www.ccc.usccb.org)).

Fr. Basil Pennington, O.C.S.O., *Listen with Your Heart* (Paraclete Press)

### YouTube/Vimeo/Podcasts

Father Jude Brady from Saint Vincent Archabbey Seminary speaks to Oblates about [Obedience](#)

Listening To God's Voice - [Obedience](#) – The Holy Rule Of St. Benedict With Fr. Mauritius Wilde, O.S.B

Br. Leven Harton, OSB, offer a 60 Second reflection on [Obedience](#)

## 6. REFLECTION QUESTIONS

This [link](#) provides an opportunity to share your responses to a few questions after you have read, reflected on and prayed over a lesson's topic. (It is not required to provide answers to the questions but Oblate Novices are encouraged to do so.)

### **Oblates & Genuine Conversion**

This section contains two factual questions; all answers are found in that lesson or pertain to it.

- 1. What obstacles exist in the world (and in us) that may prevent our obedient, immediate, and positive response to God's call? Knowing God's free gift of grace in all circumstances, what can we do to remove or to help erode these obstacles over time?**
- 2. In the *Rule*, what is meant by *mutual obedience*? Why are discernment and counsel important components in understanding God's will? Find three passages in the *Rule* where monks who are in a position of authority are called upon to show obedience to others. When you are placed in a position of authority, how does *mutual obedience* apply in your life?**

### **Personal Conversion of Life**

This section contains your choice of one reflection question. Please reply to one of the following three questions (though you are welcome to reply to more than one, if you wish):

- 3. Why is the Oblate promise of conversion of heart so closely tied to the Oblate promise of obedience? How do you see each of them at work in an ongoing process that leads you to union with God?**
- 4. How have you experienced God's grace at work in the midst of trials in your life? In what ways has your cooperation with His grace allowed you to become more obedient to His will and to grow in virtue and holiness?**
- 5. In what ways can you prepare yourself as you knowingly enter inescapable situations that may pose a threat to your peace of heart? If you experience anxiety and fear, what advice does the *Rule* give so that you may be at peace to act in fuller obedience to God in the midst of difficult situations?**

### **APPENDIX 4 – Additional Optional References for Lesson 4**

#### **Full Texts of Scripture and Rule Verses**

(This section provides more passages from the Old and New Testament and the Holy Rule. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

## Old Testament Scripture

**Ex 19:5** Now, if you obey me completely and keep my covenant, you will be my treasured possession among all peoples, though all the earth is mine.

### **Ex 20:1-17** The Ten Commandments

**Dt 4:1-2** Now therefore, Israel, hear the statutes and ordinances I am teaching you to observe, that you may live, and may enter in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your ancestors, is giving you. In your observance of the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I am commanding you, you shall not add to what I command you nor subtract from it.

**Dt 6:4-9** (The Great Commandment) Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Therefore, you shall love the LORD, your God, with your whole heart, and with your whole being, and with your whole strength. Take to heart these words which I command you today. Keep repeating them to your children. Recite them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them on your arm as a sign and let them be as a pendant on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.

**Dt 11:26-28** See, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse: a blessing for obeying the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I give you today; a curse if you do not obey the commandments of the LORD, your God, but turn aside from the way I command you today, to go after other gods, whom you do not know.

**Dt 28:1-2** Now, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD, your God, carefully observing all his commandments which I give you today, the LORD, your God, will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overwhelm you when you obey the voice of the LORD, your God.

**Dt 28:13-14** The LORD will make you the head not the tail, the top not the bottom, if you obey the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I am giving you today, observing them carefully, not turning aside, either to the right or to the left, from any of the words which I am giving you today, following other gods and serving them.

**Dt 30:19-20** I call heaven and earth today to witness against you: I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then, that you and your descendants may live, by loving the LORD, your God, obeying his voice, and holding fast to him. For that will mean life for you, a long life for you to live on the land which the LORD swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give to them.

**1 Kgs 2:3** Keep the mandate of the LORD, your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, commands, ordinances, and decrees as they are written in the law of Moses, that you may succeed in whatever you do, and wherever you turn.

**Ps 119:35** Lead me in the path of your commandments, for that is my delight.

**Prv 6:20-23** Observe, my son, your father's command, and do not reject your mother's teaching; keep them fastened over your heart always, tie them around your neck. When you lie down they will watch over you, when you wake, they will share your concerns; wherever you turn, they will guide you. For the command is a lamp, and the teaching a light, and a way to life are the reproofs that discipline.

**Eccl 4:17** Draw near for obedience, rather than for the fools' offering of sacrifice; for they know not how to keep from doing evil.

**Sir 3:18-20** Humble yourself the more, the greater you are, and you will find mercy in the sight of God. For great is the power of the Lord; by the humble he is glorified.

**Sir 32:24** Whoever keeps the law preserves himself; and whoever trusts in the LORD shall not be put to shame.

**Jer 7:23** This rather is what I commanded them: Listen to my voice; then I will be your God and you shall be my people. Walk exactly in the way I command you, so that you may prosper.

**Ez 2:8** But you, son of man, hear me when I speak to you and do not rebel like this rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you.

### **New Testament Scripture**

**Mt 1:24** When Joseph awoke, he did as the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took his wife into his home.

**Mt 6:9-15** "This is how you are to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven...."

**Mt 19:16-21** Now someone approached him and said, "Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?" He answered him, "Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." He asked him, "Which ones?" And Jesus replied, "You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother"; and 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The young man said to him, "All of these I have observed. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him, "If you wish

to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”

**Lk 1:38** Mary said, “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

**Lk 2:51** He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.

**Lk 6:46** “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ but not do what I command?”

**Lk 9:23** Then he said to all, “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.”

**Jn 14:21** Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him.”

**Acts 4:19** Peter and John, however, said to them in reply, “Whether it is right in the sight of God for us to obey you rather than God, you be the judges.

**Acts 5:29** But Peter and the apostles said in reply, “We must obey God rather than men.”

**Rom 13:1-4** Let every person be subordinate to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been established by God. Therefore, whoever resists authority opposes what God has appointed, and those who oppose it will bring judgment upon themselves. For rulers are not a cause of fear to good conduct, but to evil. Do you wish to have no fear of authority? Then do what is good and you will receive approval from it, for it is a servant of God for your good.

**Eph 6:1-17** Children, obey your parents [in the Lord], for this is right. “Honor your father and mother.” This is the first commandment with a promise, “that it may go well with you and that you may have a long life on earth.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up with the training and instruction of the Lord. Slaves, be obedient to your human masters with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ, not only when being watched, as currying favor, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, willingly serving the Lord and not human beings, knowing that each will be requited from the Lord for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. Masters, act in the same way toward them, and stop bullying, knowing that both they and you have a Master in heaven and that with him there is no partiality. Finally, draw your strength from the Lord and from his mighty

power. Put on the armor of God so that you may be able to stand firm against the tactics of the devil. For our struggle is not with flesh and blood but with the principalities, with the powers, with the world rulers of this present darkness, with the evil spirits in the heavens. Therefore, put on the armor of God, that you may be able to resist on the evil day and, having done everything, to hold your ground. So stand fast with your loins girded in truth, clothed with righteousness as a breastplate, and your feet shod in readiness for the gospel of peace. In all circumstances, hold faith as a shield, to quench all [the] flaming arrows of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

**Phil 2:5-11** Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus, Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Heb 5:8-10** Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when he was made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, declared by God high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

**Heb 11:8-10** By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By faith he sojourned in the promised land as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs of the same promise; for he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and maker is God.

**Heb 12:7-9** Endure your trials as “discipline”; God treats you as sons. For what “son” is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are without discipline, in which all have shared, you are not sons but bastards. Besides this, we have had our earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them. Should we not [then] submit all the more to the Father of spirits and live?

**1 Pt 1:22** Since you have purified yourselves by obedience to the truth for sincere mutual love, love one another intensely from a [pure] heart.

**1 Jn 2:3-4** The way we may be sure that we know him is to keep his commandments. Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

## **The Rule of St. Benedict**

**RB Prol:1-3** This passage speaks of the labor of obedience which releases us from disobedience and of the strong and noble weapons of obedience.

**RB Prol:28** This passage speaks of dashing temptations against Christ.

**RB Prol:49** This passage mentions that in obedience we “run on the path of God’s commandments.”

**RB 3:1-2** These passages refer to the abbot’s responsibility to listen before making decisions.

**RB 3:7-13** This passage warns that no one should follow his own heart’s desire but instead follow the teaching of the *Rule*.

**RB 4:21** “the love of Christ must come before all else.”

**RB 5:1-19** “The first step of humility is unhesitating obedience which comes naturally to those who cherish Christ above all.” Other aspects of open-hearted listening, cooperation and compliance are described, along with their reward. Those who choose their own wills do not receive God’s favor. We are warned of sluggishness and half-heartedness.

**RB 7:19** The *Rule* forbids us to do our own will.

**RB 7:31-43** These passages speak of imitating the Lord in following the Father’s will.

**RB 7:67-69** These passages speak of the monk obeying without effort and out of love for Christ.

**RB 22:6** This passage speaks of obedience to “arise without delay when the signal is given.”

**RB 27:5** This passage refers to the abbot having compassion for monks who stray.

**RB 31:16** This passage speaks of the cellarer to avoid pride and to act without delay.

**RB 58:14-23** Reception into the community is dependent based on the promises to observe everything and to obey every command.

**RB 62:4** Priests of the monastery “may not forget the obedience and discipline of the rule, but must make more and more progress toward God.”

Lesson 4: Obedience

**RB 66:4** This passage speaks of the porter praising God for the blessing of a person's arrival

**RB 71:1-5** This passage explains how obedience is to be a blessing shown by all.

**RB 72:11-12** "Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may He bring us all together to everlasting life."

**RB 73:8** Encouragement is given in this passage to keep "this little rule that we have written for beginners."

## Lesson 5: Stability

### INTRODUCTION

Pax!

May you find Christ's peace in your life with a right balance and a healthy rhythm of prayer and work, with the prayerful reading of Scripture and the Rule, with the study of lessons, with silent listening to God, and with your association with the Benedictine community of monks and affiliated Oblates.

We have studied the Benedictine promises of *conversatio morum* and obedience in earlier lessons. Our fifth lesson presents the third promise: stability. Now is a good time to take some time to look into our hearts and at the circumstances of our lives to understand better where more stability may be needed.

How can we better balance elements of our lives so that we are free to seek God's help in nurturing greater peace of heart in Christ? Be assured of the prayers and the support of the Benedictine community as you study and reflect on these Benedictine values.

*Lesson Five* considers the promise of stability which is closely associated with the promises of obedience and conversion of heart. Stability allows for the necessary growth to deepen our spiritual roots in Christ and in community so that we may better follow Him in every moment of our lives.

### 1. PRAYER

(This section provides the prayer that is prayed every night at the beginning of Vigils in our monastery along with Old and New Testament passages. There are more passages at the end of this document. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

*Come, O Holy Spirit, replenish the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your divine love.*

*Excite, O Lord, in your Church, the Spirit which our Most Holy Father, St. Benedict served; that filled with the same, we may study to love what he loved and practice what he taught. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*"A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit" (Ps 51:12).*

## 1.1 Old Testament Scripture

“Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: See, I am laying a stone in Zion, a stone that has been tested, a precious cornerstone as a sure foundation; whoever puts faith in it will not waver” (Is 28:16). “Blessed are those who trust in the LORD; the LORD will be their trust. They are like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: it does not fear heat when it comes, its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still produces fruit” (Jer 17:7-8).

## 1.2 New Testament Scripture

“Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock” (Matthew 7:24-25).

## 1.3 The Rule of St. Benedict

RB Prol: 48-50 “Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love. Never swerving from his instructions, then, but faithfully observing his teaching in the monastery until death, we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom.”

*Let all the faithful rejoice in the glory of our holy Father Benedict, and especially those who follow his Rule, praising him here on earth as the saints rejoice with him in heaven.*  
(Magnificat Antiphon, Feast of St. Benedict)

## 2. READINGS

*“The fourth step of humility is that in this obedience under difficult, unfavorable, or even unjust conditions, his heart quietly embraces suffering and endures it without weakening or seeking escape. For Scripture has it: ‘Anyone who perseveres to the end will be saved’ (Mt 10:22), and again, ‘Be brave of heart and rely on the Lord’” (Ps 27:14; RB 7:37).*

### 2.1 Oblate Commitment

Oblates are men and women who commit themselves to live their ordinary lives by the principles of the *Rule*; and just as the Benedictine monks take vows of stability, *conversatio morum*, and obedience, Oblates make promises to observe the spirit of these

three primary values. In the spirit of stability and in the seeking of holiness, each Oblate is affiliated with one particular Benedictine community. (For good reasons, an Oblate may seek to change his or her affiliation to a different Benedictine community.) This affiliation provides stable fellowship, mutual support, and loving communion with monks and with other Oblates in a common striving to live the motto “preferring nothing to Christ” and in a continual surrender to God so that all may experience fullness of life in Christ.

During the fourth century much instability existed in monastic life. While recognizing that movement between monasteries and into the outside world was necessary at times, St. Basil attempted to correct this problem by introducing the principle of stability. In the sixth century, St. Benedict took a further step in setting stability as a primary condition for admission into the monastery. He understood that stability created an opportunity for spiritual growth. Stability required the monk professing vows to promise that he would never depart and would persevere in the same monastery until death (RB 58:15-16). This necessary condition provided the means toward reaching the greater good of stability of heart.

## **2.2 Stability in History**

With the vow of stability, the monk roots his life in the monastery and leaves only when necessary and with the approval of the abbot (RB 50 and 51). However, the vow of stability does not mean immovability or inability to change. Stability may be thought of as an anchor. It is not meant to negate or to restrict growth but instead to provide permanence within the monastic enclosure that brings freedom for the monk to see himself as he truly is and to deepen his faith in God’s unconditional mercy. Its purpose is to limit interaction with the world as much as possible so as to protect and nurture the spiritual growth of the individual and the entire monastic community. This communal solidarity helps to foster mutual love and thus also to bear witness to stability in Christ. In the vow of stability for monks and in the promise of stability for Oblates, both are invited to sacrifice their lives for the good of others, and this self-giving is a share in the cross of Christ. The patient endurance that is linked with stability is also associated with martyrdom since it refers to a faithful willingness to participate in the sufferings of Christ in the daily circumstances of life; it reflects God’s abiding patience with us.

## **2.3 Three Benedictine Values in Dynamic Relationship**

In addition to stability, St. Benedict bound all of his monks to obedience and *conversatio morum*. Each of these promises involves listening and submission; they are fulfilled in a lifetime of commitment to a chosen vocation and a certain set of

circumstances. In obedience we submit to our superior and to God; in *conversatio morum* we submit to God by continually turning to Him in full trust; in stability we submit to life's circumstances, acknowledge our personal weaknesses and deepen our roots in God and in community. These three promises are interrelated and depend on one another; they fulfill our baptismal promises. In a dynamic relationship they point to our final hope: union with Christ.

#### **2.4 Attachment to God and to Community (RB 58:1-23)**

St. Benedict prescribed practices that would test the monk, teach him, and remind him of his covenant bond with God and with community. In the *Rule* we read that newcomers are not granted easy entry; novices are told of the hardships and difficulties that will lead to God, and they are made aware of the crosses that will be carried in life (RB 58:1-8). The entire *Rule* is read at three different times during the novitiate year with the understanding that this is the law under which the monk may freely choose to serve or to depart. If the monk stands firm, each time he returns to the monastic lifestyle to be further tested in patience (RB 58:11-23). Rank in community is based on the date of entry, the virtue of life, and the decision of the abbot so that each monk is aware of his standing in the monastery (RB 63:1). Stability is also reflected in the abbot's keeping of a list of the goods of the monastery which he entrusts to the brothers whom he appoints (RB 32:1-2.) Stability is further manifested in placing the care of the sick above all else; in them Christ is truly served (RB 36:1-3). Throughout the *Rule*, specific guidelines are established regarding the times and conditions for work, prayer, travel, and leisure according to the community's need and according to the season of the year.

#### **2.5 Purpose of Laws**

All of these laws are not meant to discourage the monk, but to strengthen him spiritually and to open his heart to God. In the vow of stability, the monk accepts a particular community, a certain place, and a specific group of people as the way to God. He promises to not escape these conditions because he sees that his true happiness is to be found in the grace of this exact place and this precise time. Undeviating commitment during the novice monk's testing and during his lifetime is an example of the meaning of Scriptural steadfastness. This steadfastness frees the monk to submit to the limitations and challenges of space and time but also to transcend these to encounter the living God.

#### **2.6 Stability as Essential to Christian Life**

For both monks and Oblates, stability is persistent fidelity to God in the midst of our chosen vocations; it is essential to Christian life. It stands against the great instability that characterizes the unpredictable and demanding nature of our world, which at times requires frequent movement and change of work and place. Without some form of stability of place and time, the often difficult inner spiritual journey to God would be impossible. It is not possible for Oblates to secure the same permanence of monastic enclosure as St. Benedict provided for his monks. However, Oblates are called to the same spirit of stability by seeking a place and time for quiet prayer along with a healthy balance of hours given to work, study, and other activities. Setting a place and time for prayer is critical because without it we become extremely vulnerable to our weaknesses, defects of temperament, and selfish desires. Without prayer, we tend to exalt ourselves and become less self-giving. We tend to forget that God is the Rock upon whom our life depends.

## 2.7 Threats to Stability

Inner stability is needed in dealing with even the simple things of life. Certain daily circumstances and relationships can cause our outlook and mood to vacillate from day to day, and at times to change from hour to hour. If allowed free reign, these repeated changes of interior disposition can cause an imbalance in our work and prayer that affects our obedience to God; they tempt us to close our hearts to God and to others. The danger exists that fear and superficiality may overtake our lives to result in bad decisions and lack of permanent commitment. This lack threatens our vocations and our relationship with God. St. Benedict recognized this danger and gave warning in regard to the gyrovagues, who are always on the move, are slaves to their own wills, and never settle down (RB 1:10-11).

## 2.8 Examples and Ways to Find Stability

St. Benedict points to the good example of the cenobites, who belong to a monastery and serve under a rule and an abbot (RB 1:1). He speaks of the good zeal of monks who show loving fear to God, humble love to their abbot, and the pure love of brothers in supporting each other with great patience in spite of weaknesses of body or behavior (RB 72:1-12). He advises us to commit ourselves and to find reality even if that reality is painful for us to bear. *Unless a situation is bad without remedy*, stability asks that we do not weaken or seek escape. If we remain, our attitude should not be one of trying to “make the best of a situation” but instead be that of calling on God in the midst of that very situation. Rather than blaming an external situation for our unhappiness, we become free to begin to see that situation as blessed with opportunity for spiritual growth and given to us by God for His greater purpose: our sanctification and the sanctification of the world.

To take the first step in seeking inner stability, we need to confront ourselves and answer the basic questions of life: *Who am I? Where am I? Where am I going? How do I feed my soul? Am I single hearted for the Lord?* Moments of solitude provide the means for this inward journey that must be walked alone. Before God, we are called to ask forgiveness for our sins, to recognize weaknesses in our own character and temperament, and to seek healing in ourselves so that He may fortify and fill us with His abundant graces and teach us to love Him above all things. Obedience, reception of the sacraments, communal solidarity, prayer, and *lectio divina* strengthen us and allow for this necessary change of heart (*conversatio morum*).

## **2.9 Benedictine Stability based on Perfect Stability of God**

St. Benedict based his understanding of stability on the constant and perfect stability of God the Father, who is eternal and without change. Scripture reminds us that the Lord is our Rock, our refuge, and our salvation: whom should we fear? (2 Sam 22:3; Ps 27:1-2; Ps 31:2-9). In Hebrew there is a quality of God referred to as *hesed*, which means “steadfast love.” It is the image of God as Rock (Ps 18:3) and is fulfilled in the very words of Jesus: “Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock” (Mt 7:24-25). God is constant and utterly reliable, and He desires for us to make Him the center of our lives. If we root ourselves in God, in Christ, He will impart to us some of the qualities of His own steadfast love. If we set ourselves on Rock and root ourselves in Christ, we will begin to find true inner stability of heart and will begin to fulfill the promise of stability as we remain firm in our love for God in the midst of an ever-changing world.

In seeking to grow closer to God, it is important that we provide the necessary conditions for ourselves. A good gardener plants a tree in a favorable location and returns to it often to be sure that it is receiving enough water and is free of disease; he provides for the tree according to its needs. He does not take it for granted that the tree will survive on its own. He knows that if the tree is left unattended, it becomes vulnerable to many elements. Likewise, that gardener would not continually uproot and transplant that tree to many different places; if continually transplanted, the tree may not grow properly, or may even die. When the tree is cared for in a stable place, its roots do not remain shallow, but become more deeply rooted in the rich soil of that garden. In time the tree endures the heat of the summer, withstands storms, and spreads its branches to produce much fruit (Jer 17:7-8). The Benedictine promise of stability asks us to stand firm with trust in God, to plant ourselves in the rich soil of Christ, and to let our roots grow deeply in His love so that when the droughts and storms of life come, we remain steadfast in Him.

Human life exists with both a physical, natural state and a spiritual, supernatural dimension. The physical state ends in death while the supernatural is eternal. Likewise, the promise of stability begins with its literal physical structure and appearance and points to an inward transformation of mind and heart. The greater of the two is the spiritual, which begins in the steadfastness of Christ's abiding love, which has the power to transform the human heart. Prayer is found at the center of stability; with Christ we receive the courage to persevere and endure in the midst of varying circumstances and difficult relationships so that we may follow God's will more perfectly.

## **2.10 Blessings of Stability**

As Oblates we are able to practice stability in the world and in our chosen vocations when we pray and ask for the gift of patience in carrying our crosses and in surrendering to the Father in all things. A sense of permanence, steadfastness, patience, fidelity, perseverance, and endurance will be manifested in our lives, and though we may not completely escape injury, we will find the greater gift of participation in Christ's Paschal Mystery. We become participants in our own sanctification and in the sanctification of the world.

Stability releases us from attachment to the things of the world and enables us to discover a poverty of spirit that opens a space in our hearts for the glory of God alone. With peace of heart, we become thankful for even the most difficult situations and challenging relationships because we know that we will find God in them and learn that "through patience we may share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in His Kingdom" (RB Prol: 50). In single-heartedness we are sustained by the Lord, as we begin to understand: "Be still and know that I am God!" (Ps 46:11). Be encouraged by the words of St. Paul: "Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up" (Gal 6:9).

## **3. SUMMARY**

### **3.1 Oblate Commitment**

- A. Order daily life based on principles found in the Rule.
- B. Observe the spirit of the Benedictine values of *conversatio morum*, obedience, and stability.
- C. Affiliate oneself with a particular monastery (and possibly a deanery).
  1. stable fellowship and mutual support
  2. continual surrender to God in "preferring nothing to Christ"

### 3.2 Stability in History

- A. In the fourth century, St. Basil introduced the principle of stability due to much instability in monastic life.
- B. In the sixth century St. Benedict set stability as the primary condition for admission into the monastery.
  - 1. Stability roots the life of the monk in the monastery.
  - 2. Permanence of monastic enclosure allows for freedom.
  - 3. Secure environment provides the opportunity for one to become aware of personal weaknesses and defects of temperament and to accept God's unconditional mercy.
  - 4. The way to salvation is to follow the cross of Christ.
  - 5. Patient endurance is associated with martyrdom.
  - 6. Spiritual fulfillment in union with Christ's Paschal Mystery is the end result.

### 3.3 Three Benedictine Values in Dynamic Relationship

- A. *Conversatio morum*, obedience, and stability are interrelated.
- B. Stability means a continued lifetime commitment in a chosen vocation with a particular set of circumstances.
- C. These values point to final hope of union in Christ:
  - 1. *Conversatio morum*: submission to God by continually turning to Him with hope and trust
  - 2. Obedience: submission to superior and to God
  - 3. Stability: submission to life's circumstances, acknowledgment of personal decisions, deepening of roots in God and in community

### 3.4 Attachment to God and to Community (RB 58:1-23)

- A. St. Benedict's practical way to test, teach, remind, and reassure the monk is through stability.
- B. Newcomers:
  - 1. are not granted easy entry
  - 2. are told of hardships and crosses, and they are free to stand firm or to depart
  - 3. have the *Rule* read in its entirety at several different times
  - 4. receive rank in the community based on date of entrance, virtue of life, and decision of abbot

C. On professing vows, the monk's statement of a promise is placed on the altar to emphasize communion with Christ and permanence.

D. Order in Community

1. A list of monastery goods is kept by the abbot and entrusted to appointed brothers (RB 32:1-2).
2. Care of the sick is placed above all else; Christ is truly served in them (RB 36:1-3).

### 3.5 Purpose of Laws

- A. Laws are not meant to discourage people but to strengthen them and open their hearts to God.
- B. General rules transcend limitations and circumstances.
- C. Through time-tested laws we encounter God's abiding presence in midst of difficulties and challenges.

### 3.6 Stability as Essential to Christian Life

- A. Stability involves simple fidelity to God in an unpredictable and demanding world.
- B. Spiritual progress is impossible without some form of stability.
- C. Oblates are called to live in a spirit of stability.
  1. Place and time for regular quiet prayer
  2. Healthy balance of hours given to work and prayer
- D. Prayer is at the center of stability.
  1. Leads to humility and self-giving rather than self-exaltation
  2. Strengthens in spite of personal weaknesses, defects of temperament, selfish desires
  3. Reminds us that God is the Rock upon whom our life depends

### 3.7 Threats to Stability

- A. Personal outlook and mood may quickly vacillate, depending on circumstances and relationships.
- B. Fears, superficiality, bad decision-making, and lack of commitment can also threaten stability.
- C. Lack of stability has negative effects on one's vocation and relationship with God.

D. St. Benedict warns of gyrovagues (RB 1:10-11).

1. They spend their entire lives drifting from region to region, never settling down.
2. They are slaves to their own wills and their gross appetites.

### 3.8 Examples and Ways to Find Stability

A. St. Benedict points to good examples of cenobites (RB 1:1) and the good zeal of faithful monks (RB 72:1-12).

1. belonging to a monastery, serving under a rule and an abbot
2. fear of God and humble love of the abbot
3. pure love shown in patient support of brothers in spite of their weaknesses of body or behavior
4. commitment and acceptance of reality even if difficult to bear
5. not weakening or seeking escape unless a situation is truly bad and without remedy

B. Here are some ways for Oblates to seek inner stability:

1. Avoid the attitude of “making the best of things” but instead call upon God for help.
2. See difficult situations as already blessed with opportunity for sanctification.
3. Answer the questions: “Who am I? Where am I? Where am I going? How do I feed my soul? Am I single-hearted for God?”
4. Ask for forgiveness and seek healing.
5. Recognize the need for obedience, sacraments, communal solidarity, prayer.

### 3.9 Benedictine Stability based on Perfect Stability of God

A. God is constant, eternal, without change and desires to be the center of our life.

1. God is Rock, refuge, salvation (Ps 18:3).
2. Hebrew word *hesed* means God’s steadfast love fulfilled in Jesus Christ.
3. Qualities of steadfast love are imparted to those rooted in Christ.
4. Stability can be compared to a tree planted in rich soil with roots growing deeply to withstand drought and storms and still to produce much fruit (Jer 17:7-8).

B. Human life exists in natural and supernatural states.

1. Natural, physical state ends in death.

2. Spiritual, supernatural dimension offers eternal life.

C. Stability exists in its physical and spiritual forms:

1. The physical form provides opportunity for spiritual growth and points to transformation.
2. Spiritual stability begins with steadfastness in Christ's abiding love and is fulfilled in eternal life.

### 3.10 Blessings of Stability

- A. Sense of permanence, steadfastness, patience, fidelity, perseverance, endurance
- B. Lessened attachment to worldly things; greater poverty of spirit
- C. Strength to carry our crosses and surrender to the Father in all things
- D. Thankfulness for difficult and challenging situations
- E. Awareness of being sustained and encouraged by the Lord not to give up (Gal 6:9)
- F. Greater participation in Christ's Paschal Mystery

## 4. SUPPLEMENTARY READING

### 4.1 Benedictine Values for Oblates – Stability

Oblates learn to practice perseverance in carrying out the obligations of their daily lives. Sustained by a deepening faith that grows into an awareness of Christ's presence with them at all times, they become grateful for the seemingly small blessings of each day and struggle against murmuring in difficult times. Stability means being rooted in Christ, no matter what happens. It is not so much a matter of outer, physical stability (although that may at times be helpful and necessary) as the inner stability that prevents one from fleeing from unavoidable suffering and that keeps one grateful for God's grace even amidst the severest of trials. Thus, through prayer and generous concern for others who suffer, Oblates learn to regard their own sufferings as a share in Christ's Cross and as an opportunity to experience loving solidarity with others who bear heavy crosses.

## 5. SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

### Books

Fr. Cyprian Smith, O.S.B., *The Path of Life: Benedictine Spirituality for Monks and Lay People (Chapter 2)*, (Ampleforth Abbey Press), 2004.

Fr. Terrence Kardong, O.S.B., *The Benedictines* (pp. 88-94), (Michael Glazier), 1988.

Esther de Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict* (Chapter 4), (Liturgical Press), 2001.

Fr. Dwight Longenecker, *St. Benedict and St. Thérèse* (Chapter 5), (Our Sunday Visitor), 2002.

Fr. Gervase Holdaway, O.S.B., *The Oblate Life* (Chapter 17), (Liturgical Press), 2008.

Fr. Donald S. Raila, O.S.B., *Lessons from Saint Benedict: Finding Joy in Daily Life* (Chapter 7), Sacred Winds Press, 2011 [also, *A Study Guide to...* (2013)].

Right Rev. Paul Delatte, O.S.B., *Rule of St. Benedict: A Commentary*, translated by Dom Justin McCann, Forgotten Books, 2012 (Originally published by Burns, Oates & Washbourne, Ltd., London, 1921).

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC, “Monastic Life,” p. 888), United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1994. (Also available online from United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [www.ccc.usccb.org](http://www.ccc.usccb.org)).

## **YouTube**

Br. Francisco of Saint Vincent College describes the unique Benedictine vow of [Stability](#).

[Stability and Conversion](#) in the Benedictine Charism with Mother Noella Marcellino, a Benedictine cloistered nun, part of *Scala's Educating for Beauty & Wisdom* series

[Stability is More Than Staying Put](#) | Sister Thomas Welder of the Benedictine Sisters of Annunciation Monastery | TEDx

[Practicing Stability Like a Monk ... Not Like an American](#) Holy Spirit Moments with Fr. Kerry Walters

## **6. REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

This [link](#) provides an opportunity to share your responses to a few questions after you have read, reflected on and prayed over a lesson's topic. (It is not required to provide answers to the questions but Oblate Novices are encouraged to do so.)

### **Oblates & Genuine Conversion**

This section contains two factual questions; all answers are found in that lesson or pertain to it.

1. **St. Benedict emphasized two types of stability. What are they? How do they relate to each other in leading one to enter into a deeper relationship with Christ?**
2. **How does the Benedictine motto “preferring nothing to Christ” apply to stability? How do the three Benedictine promises of *conversatio morum*, obedience, and stability work together in a dynamic relationship to lead you to everlasting life?**

### **Personal Conversion of Life**

This section contains your choice of one reflection question. Please reply to one of the following three questions (though you are welcome to reply to more than one, if you wish):

3. **What other words describe stability of heart? Please list several of these and explain how they apply to circumstances in your life.**
4. **Why is the image of “rock” given to God the Father in the Old Testament? (*2 Sam 22:3: “O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my God, my rock of Refuge!”*) Why are Jesus and His words referred to as being “rock, stone, and cornerstone” in the New Testament? (*Mt 7:24-25 “Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.” 1 Pt 2:6-8: “A stone that will make people stumble, and a rock that will make them fall.” Reference is also found in Acts 4:11 and Eph 2:20-22.*)**
5. **How does the spirit of detachment and poverty relate to stability?**

### **APPENDIX 5 – Additional Optional References for Lesson 5**

#### **Full Texts of Scripture and Rule Verses**

(This section provides more passages from the Old and New Testament and the Holy Rule. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

#### **Old Testament Scripture**

**Is 28:16** “Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD: See, I am laying a stone in Zion, a stone that has been tested, a precious cornerstone as a sure foundation; whoever puts faith in it will not waver.”

**Jer 17:7-8** “Blessed are those who trust in the LORD; the LORD will be their trust. They are like a tree planted beside the waters that stretches out its roots to the stream: it does not fear heat when it comes, its leaves stay green; in the year of drought it shows no distress, but still produces fruit.”

**Jos 1:9** “I command you: be strong and steadfast! Do not fear nor be dismayed, for the LORD, your God, is with you wherever you go.”

**2 Sam 22:3** “O LORD, my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my God, my rock of Refuge! My shield, my saving horn, my stronghold, my refuge, my savior, from violence you keep me safe.”

**Ps 20:8-9** “Some rely on chariots, others on horses, but we on the name of the LORD our God. They collapse and fall, but we stand strong and firm.”

**Ps 27:1-4; 13-14** “The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom should I fear? The LORD is my life’s refuge; of whom should I be afraid? When evildoers come at me to devour my flesh, these my enemies and foes themselves stumble and fall. Though an army encamp against me, my heart does not fear; though war be waged against me, even then do I trust. One thing I ask of the LORD; this I seek: to dwell in the LORD’s house all the days of my life, to gaze on the LORD’s beauty, to visit his temple. I believe I shall see the LORD’s goodness in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD, take courage; be stouthearted, wait for the LORD!”

**Ps 31:2-9** “In you, LORD, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me; incline your ear to me; make haste to rescue me! Be my rock of refuge, a stronghold to save me. For you are my rock and my fortress; for your name’s sake lead me and guide me. Free me from the net they have set for me, you are my refuge. Into your hands I commend my spirit; you will redeem me, LORD, God of truth. You hate those who serve worthless idols, but I trust in the LORD. I will rejoice and be glad in your mercy, once you have seen my misery, [and] gotten to know the distress of my soul. You will not abandon me into enemy hands, but will set my feet in a free and open space.”

**Ps 46:2-8** “God is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in distress. Thus we do not fear, though earth be shaken and mountains quake to the depths of the sea, though its waters rage and foam and mountains totter at its surging. Streams of the river gladden the city of God, the holy dwelling of the Most High. God is in its midst; it shall not be shaken; God will help it at break of day. Though nations rage and kingdoms totter, he utters his voice and the earth melts. The LORD of hosts is with us; our stronghold is the God of Jacob.”

**Ps 46: 11-12** “Be still and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, exalted on the earth.’ The LORD of hosts is with us; our stronghold is the God of Jacob.”

**Ps 51:12** “A clean heart create for me, O God; renew within me a steadfast spirit.”

**Ps 62:7** “God alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not fall.”

**Ps 63:9** “My soul clings fast to you; your right hand upholds me.”

**Ps 102:26-28** “Of old you laid the earth’s foundations; the heavens are the work of your hands. They perish, but you remain; they all wear out like a garment; like clothing you change them and they are changed, but you are the same, your years have no end.”

**Ps 112:6-7** “For he shall never be shaken; the righteous shall be remembered forever. He shall not fear an ill report; his heart is steadfast, trusting the LORD.”

**Ps 125:1** “Those trusting in the LORD are like Mount Zion, unshakable, forever enduring.”

**Prv 17:17** “A friend is a friend at all times, and a brother is born for the time of adversity.”

**Dan 6:27** “For he is the living God, enduring forever, whose kingdom shall not be destroyed, whose dominion shall be without end.”

**Hos 2:21-22** “I will betroth you to me forever: I will betroth you to me with justice and with judgment, with loyalty and with compassion; I will betroth you to me with fidelity, and you shall know the LORD.”

### **New Testament Scripture**

**Matthew 7:24-25** “Everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and buffeted the house. But it did not collapse; it had been set solidly on rock.”

**Mt 16:18** “And so I say to you, you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of the netherworld shall not prevail against it.”

**Mt 24:13** “But the one who perseveres to the end will be saved.”

**Lk 9:62** “Jesus said, ‘No one who sets a hand to the plow and looks to what was left behind is fit for the kingdom of God.’”

**Jn 6:67-69** “Jesus then said to the Twelve, ‘Do you also want to leave?’ Simon Peter answered him, ‘Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God.’”

**Jn 15:1-5** “I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He takes away every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and every one that does he prunes so that it bears more fruit. You are already pruned because of the word that I spoke to you. Remain in me, as I remain in you. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit on its own unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.”

**Rom 8:35-37** “What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword? As it is written: “For your sake we are being slain all the day; we are looked upon as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us.”

**1 Cor 16:13-14** “Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, be courageous, be strong. Your every act should be done with love.”

**1 Cor 15:58** “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

**2 Cor 4:8-10** “We are afflicted in every way, but not constrained; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our body.”

**2 Cor 4:18** “...as we look not to what is seen but to what is unseen; for what is seen is transitory, but what is unseen is eternal.”

**2 Tim 2:11-12** “This saying is trustworthy: If we have died with him we shall also live with him; if we persevere we shall also reign with him.”

**Heb 3:14-15** “We have become partners of Christ if only we hold the beginning of the reality firm until the end, for it is said: ‘Oh, that today you would hear his voice: Harden not your hearts as at the rebellion.’”

**Heb 10:36** “You need endurance to do the will of God and receive what he has promised.”

**Heb 12:1-3** “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us rid ourselves of every burden and sin that clings to us and persevere in running the race that lies before us while keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, the leader and perfecter of faith. For the sake of the joy that lay before him he endured the cross, despising its shame, and has taken his seat at the right of the throne of God. Consider how he endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lose heart.”

**Jas 1:2-4** “Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you encounter various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. And let perseverance be perfect, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

**Jas 1:12** “Blessed is the man who perseveres in temptation, for when he has been proved he will receive the crown of life that he promised to those who love him.”

**Jas 5:7-8** “Be patient, therefore, brothers, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. You too must be patient. Make your hearts firm, because the coming of the Lord is at hand.”

**1 Pt 5: 8-10** “Be sober and vigilant. Your opponent the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for [someone] to devour. Resist him, steadfast in faith, knowing that your fellow believers throughout the world undergo the same sufferings. The God of all grace who called you to his eternal glory through Christ [Jesus] will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you after you have suffered a little.”

**2 Pt 1:5-7** “For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, virtue with knowledge, knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with devotion, devotion with mutual affection, mutual affection with love.”

**Rv 3:10-11** “Because you have kept my message of endurance, I will keep you safe in the time of trial that is going to come to the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. I am coming quickly. Hold fast to what you have, so that no one may take your crown.”

### **The Rule of St. Benedict**

**RB Prol: 48-50** “Do not be daunted immediately by fear and run away from the road that leads to salvation. It is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way

of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love. Never swerving from his instructions, then, but faithfully observing his teaching in the monastery until death, we shall through patience share in the sufferings of Christ that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom."

**RB 4:21** "The love of Christ must come before all else."

**RB 4:74** "And finally, never lose hope in God's mercy."

**RB 4:48-49 [RB 7:12-13, RB 31:8-11]** These verses explain how the monk guards himself from sins and vices by keeping careful watch over his soul, aware that God's gaze is upon him at every moment wherever he may be, so in serving well, he may secure a good standing for himself.

**RB 4:78** "The workshop where we are to toil faithfully at all these tasks is the enclosure of the monastery and stability in the community."

## **Lesson 6: Prayer and Lectio Divina**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Pax!

This lesson on prayer and lectio divina marks the midpoint in completing the Oblate Novice Formation Program and includes the same familiar steps as found in previous lessons.

Short, easily memorized passages from Scripture and the Rule have accompanied the lessons' cover letters, paragraphs, and outlines.

Now is a good time to give thought and prayer to the lessons that have been shared so far and to look forward to the upcoming lessons: Liturgy of the Hours; Culmination of Worship: The Eucharist; Work; Hospitality; Challenge of Silence; and Simplicity and Poverty.

The practice to be undertaken by all is studying and reading a portion of the Rule of St. Benedict at least weekly and trying to apply the passages to one's daily life; one should read the Rule reflectively as lectio divina and study it with the help of a commentary or at meetings with one's fellow Oblates.

At your final Oblation, you may choose to take on an "Oblate name," which may be the name of any saint whose friendship and assistance one wishes to invoke on one's journey of faith. This optional name has no legal status and is not normally used even in gatherings of Oblates but has personal significance in terms of one's Oblate commitment. Your Oblate name is recorded on your Oblation certificate. Many Oblates opt for the name of a Benedictine saint (See Section 4 in Lesson 7).

May you find Christ's peace in your life with a right balance and a healthy rhythm of prayer and work, with the prayerful reading of Scripture and the Rule, with the study of lessons, with silent listening to God, and with your association with the Benedictine community of monks and affiliated Oblates.

*Lesson Six considers the meaning and the importance of prayer in our lives.*

## **1. PRAYER**

(This section provides the prayer that is prayed every night at the beginning of Vigils in our monastery along with Old and New Testament passages. There are more passages at the end of this document. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

*Come, O Holy Spirit, replenish the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your divine love.*

*Excite, O Lord, in your Church, the Spirit which our Most Holy Father, St. Benedict served; that filled with the same, we may study to love what he loved and practice what he taught. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*“A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit” (Ps 51:12).*

### **1.1 Old Testament Scripture**

“I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall be always in my mouth. My soul will glory in the LORD; let the poor hear and be glad. Magnify the LORD with me; and let us exalt his name together” (Ps 34:2-4).

### **1.2 New Testament Scripture**

“And he said to them, ‘Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him,’ and he says in reply from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything.’ I tell you, if he does not get up to give him the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence. And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit to those who ask him?’” [Lk 11:5-13 (Mt 7:7-11)].

### **1.3 The Rule of St. Benedict**

“Listen readily to holy reading, and devote yourself often to prayer. Every day with tears and sighs confess your past sins to God in prayer and change from these evil ways in the future” (RB 4:55-58). “What page, what passage of the inspired books of the Old and New Testaments is not the truest of guides for human life?” (RB 73:3).

## 2. READINGS

“I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands, calling on your name” (Ps 63:5).

“I will listen for what God, the LORD, has to say” (Ps 85:9).

“Thus the monks will always be ready to arise without delay when the signal is given; each will hasten to arrive at the Work of God before the others, yet with all dignity and decorum” (RB 22:6).

## PRAYER

### 2.1 What is Prayer?

What images come to mind when we think of prayer? The Eucharistic Liturgy, Liturgy of the Hours, *lectio divina*, family prayers before meals, prayers with a friend, and the silent prayer found in the deepest part of our hearts may all come to mind. At times prayer is verbal and communal; at other times, it is nonverbal and solitary. Prayer may arise spontaneously in our hearts, or it may follow some preparation. It is important to realize that our prayer changes according to our circumstances; and though we may think of prayer as “belonging to us,” the source of prayer and its movement are always found in God. It is God who begins our prayer, sustains it, and brings it to completion as He continually lavishes His graces upon us. It is important for us to realize that “here we have no lasting city, but we seek the one that is to come” (Heb 13:14). We need to welcome Christ with a daily commitment to prayer, no matter our circumstances or dispositions. When we present ourselves to God as we truly are, our hearts open up; He then encourages and expands our hearts in whatever ways He chooses so that we may “continually offer God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name” (Heb 13:15). In prayer we find ourselves beginning our journey home.

### 2.2 Prayer is at the Heart of the Benedictine Promises

The goal of the spiritual life is to be sanctified. At the heart of the three Benedictine promises of *conversatio morum*, obedience, and stability is prayer, which can be described as a lifting of the heart and mind to God in faith and hope as we wait with patient endurance (cf. Rom 8:25). The foundation of prayer is humility: the recognition that “the Spirit comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we

ought” (Rom 8:26). When we realize our inadequacies and humble ourselves, we begin to pray and open ourselves more fully to receive God’s gift of prayer. St. Augustine saw man as a beggar before God with Christ’s promise that “the one who humbles himself will be exalted” (Lk 18:14). St. Thérèse of Lisieux wrote, “For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven, it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy” (CCC, #2558-2559).

### **2.3 St. Benedict and the Rule say much about Prayer**

In the Rule, St. Benedict’s first words are “Listen carefully, my son” (RB Prol: 1). Listening is our way of saying “Yes” to God as did Mary when she was asked to follow God’s will in becoming the Mother of God (Greek Theotokos). We are asked to say “Yes” to God in our prayer as well. St. Benedict reminds the monk that God is always present and sees us everywhere (RB 19:1). He sets guidelines that monks should wake up and quietly encourage one another in prayer (RB 22:8) and that their prayer should be short and pure, and with heartfelt devotion (RB 20:4; 52:4). He states that prayer should begin every good work (RB Prol:4) and that when monks pray unceasingly, they will begin to see simple things as sacred as the vessels on the altar (RB 31:10). He prepares the monks to be ready to accept some strictness so as to amend faults and to safeguard love (RB Prol: 47) so that they may return to disciplined prayer. St. Benedict reminds the abbot to place prayer above all when faced with difficulties with monks (RB 28:4). In all of this St. Benedict wants his monks to recognize that they are children of God and that continual prayer creates habitual awareness of God’s abiding presence in our lives. “On hearing the signal for the divine office, the monk is to immediately set aside what he has in hand and go with utmost speed, yet with gravity and without giving occasion for frivolity. Indeed, nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God” (RB 43: 1-3). As he did for his monks in the Rule, St. Benedict prompts us as Benedictine Oblates to that same wakefulness, stirs our hearts to desire God, and leads us toward a willingness to conform our lives according to His will: “Are you hastening toward your heavenly home?” (RB 73:8).

God is present in the depths of our hearts. His presence gives us the freedom to allow grace to flow naturally into the present moment: He heals us from the wounds of the past and frees us from dread of the future. However, as simple as prayer should be, we often find ourselves confronting many obstacles that seem to prevent prayer or even make prayer seemingly impossible. At times God may seem very distant and absent as we become more aware of our weaknesses, guilt and loneliness. However in the very midst of our sometimes strong emotions, restlessness, and desolation, God’s invitation remains as He calls us to go beyond ourselves: to seek God our Father, who wants a personal relationship with us, no matter what may be our present situation or circumstance in life. Prayer is not a search for some impersonal distant energy or

power; it is not a search for an answer to a complex puzzle. Prayer is a seeking of God our Father with an inward journey of the heart. We need to remember that we are created from nothing and that without God, without prayer, we become nothing. Prayer opens the door of our hearts to allow our human wills to be transformed into greater union with Christ Jesus. Prayer brings us to greater communion in Christ and in community; in prayer we truly follow Christ.

## **2.4 Prayer should Continue during Times of Trial**

Prayer is the essential means of our coming home. It is not unusual that very often the spark of prayer is ignited during times of pain and crisis. Scripture speaks of suffering in the Book of Job in the Old Testament and in the parable of the prodigal son in the New Testament (Lk 15:11-32); both experienced great suffering, helplessness, and a feeling of being isolated from God. Each of them lost all of his earthly blessings and cried out for mercy, for healing, and for the restoration of life.

God allowed experiences of desolation for both Job and the prodigal son for one reason: to draw each of them closer to Him. For Job, who had never rebelled against God, his suffering became the path to deepen his existing trust and faith in God. For the prodigal son, who had rebelled against his father and lived a life of dissipation, his suffering became a way for him to recognize and to correct disorders in his life and to return to his father. In trusting submission and in faith, both of them presented themselves humbly and opened their hearts to experience the great mercy and love of the Father.

At times in our lives, we may experience the sufferings of Job, and at other times we may experience the self-inflicted sufferings of the prodigal son. At all times, it is imperative that we continue to trust in God, to correct any disorders that exist, to present ourselves humbly before Him, to persist in faith and hope, and to persevere in prayer. “Consider the generations long past and see: has anyone trusted in the Lord and been disappointed? Has anyone persevered in his fear and been forsaken? Has anyone called upon him and been ignored?” (Sir 2:10). “I thank you, Lord, with all my heart; in the presence of the angels to you I sing. I bow low toward your holy temple; I praise your name for your mercy and faithfulness. For you have exalted over all your name and your promise. On the day I cried out, you answered; you strengthened my spirit” (Ps 138:1-3).

It is critical for us to accept that we are not in control of our prayer; God is in control. It is also important for us to understand that difficulties in life may enter into our prayer life and may cause distractions, discouragements, fears, doubts about God’s love for us, or even doubts about His existence. During these times when our prayer is challenged

or threatened, we should simply keep trying to pray as best we can and keep turning to our God, who loves us in every moment of life. God has the power to remove all obstacles to prayer according to His will and always for our greatest benefit. However, we need to be mindful that His response to our prayer may be different from our expectations and even appear in contrast to them. We need to know also that difficulties do not lessen the value of prayer. When our prayer feels very dry or distracted but we persevere, God may be very pleased with our efforts. Prayer does not need to “feel good” to be valid!

If difficulties in prayer persist, then after prayer, we should take time to consider what may be disordered in our lives and if necessary, take the steps to correct the problem. If we cannot find a disorder to correct, then we simply need to persevere in prayer. This situation may be an opportunity to seek spiritual direction and counsel so as to better understand how God is at work in our lives. Abbot John Chapman wrote that “the will to pray is prayer” and that “you should pray as you can and not pray as you cannot.” We need to let Christ enter into our prayer at all times, whether our prayer is filled with joy and thanksgiving, or characterized by earnest petition, or when it is bombarded with distractions, emptiness, or distress. God asks us to keep praying and to simply pray the best that we can. Both in sorrow and in joy we are to ask Christ to enter at every moment.

## **2.5 Prayer Leads Us to God and to Others**

We know from experience that to build a relationship with another person, we need to keep lines of communication open. When we stop communicating, we tend to feel distant from that person and over time may lose touch altogether. Prayer is our line of communication with God. There is no such thing as loving another person or loving God from afar. Love is personal, and it reaches deeply into our hearts and flows out into community. Prayer allows us continually to refocus our attention on God and on His will. We need then to seek that will for each person and in each situation that presents itself during our daily lives. Prayer allows God to be at the center of our hearts and brings us into union with Christ and also with all others who have answered “Yes” to His call. Prayer leads us to live Christian lives with greater compassion and provision for others (RB 37).

## **LECTIO DIVINA**

### **2.6 What is Lectio Divina?**

Lectio divina is sacred reading directed to the divine mysteries of God to allow for growth in holiness. The practice of lectio divina is a work of faith and a source of prayer

that usually involves Sacred Scripture. It involves the whole person and enriches and strengthens one throughout life. At times lectio divina may not seem to be fruitful; at other times, it may give us insights and even lead to action. St. Benedict regarded it as one of the fundamental tools of the spiritual craft (RB 4: 55-56): he set aside two to three hours of sacred reading each day for the monks. In the time of St. Benedict breviaries did not exist; so for the monks to be able to enter more deeply into the sacred words, they needed to listen carefully to the reader and to reflect on what they had memorized from Scripture and from other rare manuscripts. While reading and prayer took place in designated quiet areas of the dormitories, lectio divina most often took place in the oratory or chapter-room.

## **2.7 How Is Lectio Divina Done?**

Traditionally lectio divina involves four elements: reading (lectio), reflection (meditatio), prayer (oratio), and contemplation (contemplatio). Preparation for lectio divina may include a careful choosing of a passage of Scripture or some other suitable text. It begins with slow, peaceful, intellectual reading for understanding that pauses when a word or phrase strikes the reader with meaning. At this point, reflection and meditation begin as the reader asks God what He is saying to him, and he then speaks to God about the meaning he has derived. In quiet prayerful presence before the Lord, the reader may be led to thanksgiving, sorrow, or petition; the reader may find that God is seeking some further action from him; or the reader may experience contemplation with total attention to the Lord - a gaze of the heart that allows Christ to pray in us. Many times, however, the mere reading of and reflection on Sacred Scripture are all that God asks. Generally lectio divina asks these questions: What is the literal meaning of the sacred reading? What meaning exists beyond the literal interpretation? What does this reading mean to me? How does God want me to apply this meaning to my life?

## **2.8 Scripture Is a Plow that Opens Hearts**

In the Conferences, John Cassian sees Scripture as a plow that opens our hearts to the seeds of God's word. Practicing lectio divina with an open heart allows us to root ourselves in the peace of Christ and to carry God's message out to others in the midst of our busy daily activities. The more often and the better we practice lectio divina, the more easily we shall be able to find God's presence in every situation. We shall be strengthened to follow His voice: "You that have ears to hear, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches (Rv 2:7). And what does he say? Come and listen to me, sons; I will teach you the fear of the Lord" (Ps 34:12) (RB Prol: 8-12). There is also a warning that if we start neglecting the spiritual discipline found in the reading of sacred writings, in time we will notice a growing spiritual insensitivity, with an accompanying hardness of

heart. We must stay awake to listen to God's call to remember Him always and to enter actively into the Paschal Mystery of His Son, Jesus Christ, by means of our Oblation through prayer and good works.

Prayer and sacred reading are works that promise eternal life through faith and perseverance. St. Benedict warned that "the road to eternal life is bound to be narrow at the outset. But as we progress in this way of life and faith, we shall run on the path of God's commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love" (RB Prol: 48-49). Each morning we join in communion with the whole Church as the Body of Christ praying the Canticle of Zechariah at the end of Lauds: "In the tender compassion of our God the dawn from on high shall break upon us, to shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death, and to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Lk 1: 68-79). And each evening we bring closure to our day in praying the Magnificat and praising the greatness of the Lord: "He has come to the help of his servant Israel for he has remembered his promise of mercy, the promise he made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever" (Lk 1: 46-55). In the Rule, St. Benedict encourages us: "And finally never lose hope in God's mercy. These, then, are the tools of the spiritual craft. When we have used them without ceasing day and night and have returned them on judgment day, our wages will be the reward the Lord has promised: What the eye has not seen nor the ear heard, God has prepared for those who love Him" (1 Cor 2:9) (RB 4:74-75).

### 3. SUMMARY

#### 3.1 What is Prayer?

- A. Seeking God with an inward journey of the heart
- B. Lifting of the mind and heart to God as we wait with patient endurance (Rom 8:25)
- C. Eucharistic Liturgy, Liturgy of the Hours, lectio divina, prayer with family/friend, private
- D. Verbal or silent, communal or solitary, spontaneous or after some preparation
- E. Changes with circumstances
- F. Is always possible regardless of personal disposition or mood
- G. Source and movement found in God who begins, sustains, and brings to completion

#### 3.2 Prayer is at the Heart of the Benedictine Promises of Conversatio Morum, Obedience, and Stability

- A. Listening and saying “Yes” as did Mary when asked to be Mother of God (Theotokos)
- B. Accepting our inadequacies, asking forgiveness for sins, correcting disorders
- C. Humbly and honestly presenting ourselves to God with an open heart at every moment
- D. Having the will to pray, remaining constant in prayer, waiting with patient endurance
- E. Accepting God’s answer to prayer as His will - not according to our will
- F. Openness to seek and to follow spiritual direction and counsel

### 3.3 St. Benedict and the Rule say much about Prayer

- A. “Listen carefully, my son” (RB Prol: 1)
- B. We are adopted children of God.
- C. God is always present and sees us everywhere ( RB 19:1).
- D. Guidelines for waking and encouraging each other in prayer (RB 22:8)
- E. Prayer should be short, pure and frequent (RB 20:4; 52:4).
- F. Prayer should begin every good work (RB Prol:4).
- G. Simple things are seen as being as sacred as the vessels on the altar (RB 31:10).
- H. Some strictness is needed so as to amend faults and to safeguard love (RB Prol: 47).
- I. Abbot is to place prayer above all when faced with difficulties with monks (RB 28:4).
- J. Awareness of God’s abiding presence
- K. Nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God (RB 43: 1-3).
- L. Wakefulness that stirs the heart to lead us to conversion according to God’s will
- M. We hasten toward our heavenly home (RB 73:8).

### 3.4 Prayer should Continue during Times of Trial

- A. Prayer often ignited during times of pain and crises
- B. Old Testament Book of Job and New Testament parable of prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32)
  - 1. Sufferings allowed by God to draw each closer to Him
  - 2. Job’s suffering was path to deepen his already existing trust and faith in God

3. Prodigal son's self-inflicted suffering was path to recognize disorder and to ask for mercy and forgiveness

C. Obstacles in prayer

1. Guilt with need to ask forgiveness
2. Difficulties in life
3. Personal weaknesses, loneliness, strong emotions, doubts, restlessness
4. Seeing God as distant power, impersonal, too complex to be understood

D. Overcoming obstacles in prayer

1. Accept personal weaknesses that remain
2. Take steps to correct disorders in life
3. Seek and accept spiritual counsel to understand how God is at work
4. Believe that God is in control of our prayer
5. Realize that difficulties in life will enter our prayer to cause distractions
6. See that distractions and temptations in prayer can lead us to greater humility
7. and draw us closer to God.
8. Accept God's response to our prayer, which may differ from our expectations.
9. Have confidence that "the will to pray is prayer."
10. "Pray as you can and do not pray as you cannot" (Abbot John Chapman).
11. Prayer leads us to God, whether we experience consolations or desolations.

3.5 Prayer Leads Us to God and to Others

- A. Danger of growing distant if we stop communicating
- B. Love is personal and cannot grow through distancing.
- C. Prayer is line of communication with God and flows into community.
- D. Prayer allows God to be at center of our hearts.
- E. Prayer leads us to live Christian lives with greater compassion and provision for others (RB 37).

3.6 What is Lectio Divina?

- A. Sacred reading directed to the divine mysteries of God
- B. Work of faith and a source of prayer that usually involves Sacred Scripture

- C. One of the tools of the spiritual craft (RB 4:55-56)
- D. Meditative holy reading that involves the whole person
- E. Listening that is capable of active response
- F. May be very inspirational, may lead to action, may be merely prayerful reading without insights

### 3.7 How Is Lectio Divina Done?

- A. Preparation may include careful choosing of Scripture or a spiritual book
- B. Lectio is slow, peaceful, intellectual reading for understanding
- C. Pause when word or phrase strikes the reader with meaning
- D. Meditatio is reflection and meditation - asking God and listening for His meaning
- E. Oratio is prayer of thanksgiving, sorrow, petition.
- F. Contemplatio is total attention on God, a gaze of the heart with Christ praying in us.
- G. Mere reading and reflection is often all that God asks
- H. Further action may result.
- I. General steps in lectio divina
  1. What is the literal meaning of the sacred reading?
  2. What meaning exists beyond the literal interpretation?
  3. What does this reading mean to me?
  4. How does God want me to apply this meaning to my life?

### 3.8 Scripture Is a Plow that Opens Hearts to the Seeds of God's Word (John Cassian)

- A. Stirs us to stay awake to listen to God's call
- B. Allows us to root ourselves more deeply in Christ
- C. Enables us to be centered in Christ and to share God's word with others in daily life
- D. Results in ability to see Christ in every moment of life
- E. Invites us to enter into Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ through prayer and good works

## 4. SUPPLEMENTARY READING

#### **4.1 Prayer and Work: A Balanced Life**

In a society which often becomes ensnared in relentless work or pleasure-filled indulgence, the Oblate seeks to live a life totally dedicated to God and, therefore, balanced among prayer, work, creative leisure, and reading that nourishes the spirit. The experience of the ages shows that such balance best keeps a person from being caught up in anything other than God Himself.

Prayer is an expression of the Oblate's faith-response to God and is directed to facilitate habitual union with God. It is not simply a matter of praying from time to time but of directing one's whole life to union with God. Sensitivity to God's presence leads the Oblate to gaze with wonder and gratitude upon the gracious deeds that God has wrought, not only in history but in one's personal life yesterday and today. The Benedictine attitude of prayer is also one of expectant waiting for the mysterious coming of God from moment to moment, so that the Oblate seeks to greet the Lord as He comes in His own sovereign, and often surprising, way in each circumstance.

The Oblate undertakes his or her work not so much as a means of gaining material wealth but rather as an opportunity to share in God's own creative love and in Christ's ongoing redemption of all creation. The Oblate takes up daily work as a task full of hope and promise and as a service to others in family, community, Church, and world. Since for the Christian work is linked with charity to the poor and discipleship of Christ, Oblates must refuse to be dominated by things so that they may be free to serve God and neighbor and have something to give to the poor (RB 31:9, 55:9).

The Oblate also allows for sufficient time with family and time for community activities, according to the way God calls through one's particular circumstances.

The Oblate need not feel guilty for setting aside time for holy reading and holy leisure which can nourish the spirit and ward off the frenzy that comes from workaholism.

#### **4.2 The Practice of Lectio Divina**

"Lectio divina", the meditative reading of holy writings, especially the Bible, is an important part of the Oblate's life of prayer. (The Rule prescribes several hours each day for lectio, which is far more than most monastic communities could prescribe today.) Such reading is done not for intellectual information or for emotional stimulation but for the sake of savoring God's word and, through the Word, entering more deeply into relationship with God. Holy reading can enable us both to hear what God is saying to us today and to enter into contemplation, a total, wordless attention to the Lord in which we welcome Him to pray in us.

It might be well here to note the traditional teaching of lectio leading to meditatio ("meditation"), and oratio ("prayer") leading to contemplatio ("contemplation"). A slow, gentle reading of the text should lead the mind to savor each portion of the reading so that one can listen to the Lord's still, small voice. Memories and thoughts which rise up in this process are a part of meditation. Then one can respond by speaking to God in "prayer"; in other words, one gives to God what has been found in one's heart. Finally, one may be led simply to rest in God's embrace without words, thoughts, or emotions, such simple abiding being contemplation. This process is not normally a steady, neat progression but rather a gentle oscillation among the four stages, according to one's disposition and God's graces. [See the article by Luke Dysinger, O.S.B., "Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina," in *Valyermo Benedictine*, Vol. I, No. 1.]

One suggestion for doing daily lectio is to use one of the readings for the Mass of the day, which can be found in a parish missalette. It is better, however, to read through a whole book of the Bible, over the course of, say, several weeks (or months), for a specified period of time each. In that way every verse of God's word is embraced, even the verses that are hard to understand.

### **4.3 Reverence for Scripture**

In conjunction with lectio, the Oblate is called to nurture a great reverence for the Scriptures as the Word of God. Oblates are urged to gain a basic understanding of the Bible through group or private study, through the reading of commentaries, and through special attentiveness to the Word when it is read in the liturgy of the Church.

## **5. SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES**

### **Books**

Garcia M. Colombás, *Reading God: Lectio Divina* (BMH Publications).

Fr. Michael Casey, O.C.S.O., *Sacred Reading* (Triumph Books).

Dom Roger Chapman, O.S.B., Dom John Hudleston, O.S.B., editor, *The Spiritual Letters of Dom John Chapman*, (Sheed and Ward, 1946).

Fr. Thomas Green, S.J., *When the Well Runs Dry* (Ave Maria Press, 1979).

Sister M. Dolores Dowling, O.S.B., "Instructions for Benedictine Oblates," Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Tucson, AZ.

Daniel Rees and Other Members of the English Benedictine Congregation, *Consider Your Call: A Theology of Monastic Life Today* (Cistercian Studies Series), 1978.

Tolbert McCarroll, “*Humanizing Humility: RB 7: A Psychology of Spiritual Growth*,”  
Benedictines, Fall-Winter 1980/81.

Right Rev. Paul Delatte, O.S.B., *Rule of St. Benedict: A Commentary*, translated by Dom  
Justin McCann, Forgotten Books, 2012 (Originally published by Burns, Oates &  
Washbourne, Ltd., London, 1921).

Fr. Donald S. Raila, O.S.B., *Lessons from Saint Benedict: Finding Joy in Daily Life*, Sacred  
Winds Press, 2011 [also, A Study Guide to... (2013)].

Fr. Michael Casey, O.C.S.O., *The Road to Eternal Life*, Liturgical Press, 2012.

*Strangers to the City*, Paraclete Press, 2013.

Fr. Thomas Acklin, O.S.B., “*Silent Retreat*,” St. Emma Monastery, July 15-17, 2016.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC, #2558-2559), United States Catholic Conference,  
Inc., 1994. (Also available online from United States Conference of Catholic Bishops  
[www.ccc.usccb.org](http://www.ccc.usccb.org)).

## **YouTube**

Father Edward Mazich, O.S.B., rector of Saint Vincent Seminary, speaks to the Oblates  
of Saint Benedict of Saint Vincent Archabbey on the topic of [Lectio Divina](#)

Dr. Brant Pitre discusses [Lectio Divina](#) on Catholic Productions

[Hearers of the Word](#) by Fr Michael Casey’s 3rd and final conference focuses on Lectio  
Divina and how to use this method of prayer

Abbot Greogy Polan, OSB on [Lectio Divina](#)

Father Donald S. Raila, O.S.B., a Benedictine monk, discusses the Rule of Benedict and  
[Lectio Divina](#)

Why You Need [Lectio Divina](#) by Father Boniface Hicks

[Introduction – Praying the Liturgy of the Hours](#) with Fr. Timothy Gallagher

## **6. REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

This [link](#) provides an opportunity to share your responses to a few questions after you  
have read, reflected on and prayed over a lesson’s topic. (It is not required to provide  
answers to the questions but Oblate Novices are encouraged to do so.)

## **Oblates & Genuine Conversion**

This section contains two factual questions; all answers are found in that lesson or pertain to it.

- 1. What are some types of prayer? Where is the source and movement of all prayer found?**
- 2. What is the practice of lectio divina? What are its four dimensions?**

### **Personal Conversion of Life**

This section contains your choice of one reflection question. Please reply to one of the following three questions (though you are welcome to reply to more than one, if you wish):

- 3. Why do you pray? What is necessary for prayer to occur?**
- 4. Why does God want you to “pray at all times”? How do you respond to His call during periods of sadness and pain compared to periods of joy and thanksgiving?**
- 5. In what ways do you see lectio divina to be essential to your growth in holiness?**

### **APPENDIX 6– Additional Optional References for Lesson 6**

#### **Full Texts of Scripture and Rule Verses**

(This section provides more passages from the Old and New Testament and the Holy Rule. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

#### **Old Testament Scripture**

**Ps 34:2-4** “I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall be always in my mouth. My soul will glory in the LORD; let the poor hear and be glad. Magnify the LORD with me; and let us exalt his name together.”

**Gn 18:27** “Abraham spoke up again: ‘See how I am presuming to speak to my Lord, though I am only dust and ashes!’”

**1 Sm 3:1-18** “If you are called, reply, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening’” (vs.9)

**1 Chr 16:11** “Rely on the mighty LORD; constantly seek his face.”

**Tb 4:19** “At all times bless the Lord, your God, and ask him that all your paths may be straight and all your endeavors and plans may prosper.”

**Tb 12:8** “Prayer with fasting is good.”

**Ps 4:2** “Answer me when I call, my saving God. When troubles hem me in, set me free; take pity on me, hear my prayer.”

**Ps 5:3-4** “Attend to the sound of my cry, my king and my God! For to you I will pray, LORD; in the morning you will hear my voice; in the morning I will plead before you and wait.”

**Ps 18:7** “In my distress I called out: LORD! I cried out to my God. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry to him reached his ears.”

**Ps 37:7** “Be still before the LORD; wait for him.”

**Ps 95:7-8** “Oh, that today you would hear his voice: Do not harden your hearts as at Meribah, as on the day of Massah in the desert.”

**Ps 138:1-3** “I thank you, Lord, with all my heart; in the presence of the angels to you I sing. I bow low toward your holy temple; I praise your name for your mercy and faithfulness. For you have exalted over all your name and your promise. On the day I cried out, you answered; you strengthened my spirit.”

**Ps 141:2** “Let my prayer be incense before you; my uplifted hands an evening offering.”

**Ps 143:1-8** “LORD, hear my prayer; in your faithfulness listen to my pleading; answer me in your righteousness. Hasten to answer me, LORD; for my spirit fails me. Do not hide your face from me. In the morning let me hear of your mercy, for in you I trust.”

**Ps 145:18** “The LORD is near to all who call upon him, to all who call upon him in truth.”

**Sir 2:10** “Consider the generations long past and see: has anyone trusted in the Lord and been disappointed? Has anyone persevered in his fear and been forsaken? Has anyone called upon him and been ignored?”

**Sir 7:10** “Do not be impatient in prayer or neglect almsgiving.”

**Is 50:4-5** “Morning after morning he wakens my ear to hear as disciples do; the Lord GOD opened my ear; I did not refuse, did not turn away.”

**Is 65:24** “Before they call, I will answer; while they are yet speaking, I will hear.”

**Jer 29:12** “When you call me, and come and pray to me, I will listen to you.”

**Jer 33:3** “Call to me, and I will answer you; I will tell you great things beyond the reach of your knowledge.”

### **New Testament Scripture**

**Lk 11:5-13 (Mt 7:7-11)** “And he said to them, ‘Suppose one of you has a friend to whom he goes at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread, for a friend of mine has arrived at my house from a journey and I have nothing to offer him,’ and he says in reply from within, ‘Do not bother me; the door has already been locked and my children and I are already in bed. I cannot get up to give you anything.’ I tell you, if he does not get up to give him the loaves because of their friendship, he will get up to give him whatever he needs because of his persistence. And I tell you, ask and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and the one who seeks, finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. What father among you would hand his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion when he asks for an egg? If you then, who are wicked, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the holy Spirit to those who ask him?’”

**Mt 6:6-13 (cf. Luke 11:2-4)** “But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him. This is how you are to pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and do not subject us to the final test, but deliver us from the evil one.”

**Mt 18:19-20** “Again, [amen,] I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

**Mk 11:24** “Therefore I tell you, all that you ask for in prayer, believe that you will receive it and it shall be yours.”

**Lk 6:27-28 (Mt 5:44)** “But to you who hear I say, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.”

**Lk 18:1-8** “Then he (Jesus) told them a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary.....”

**Jn 14:13** “And whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.”

**Jn 17** This chapter contains “The Prayer of Jesus.”

**Acts 4:24-31** “And when they heard it, they raised their voices to God with one accord and said, ‘Sovereign Lord, maker of heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them, you said by the holy Spirit through the mouth of our father David, your servant: ‘Why did the Gentiles rage and the peoples entertain folly? The kings of the earth took their stand and the princes gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed. Indeed they gathered in this city against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed, Herod and Pontius Pilate, together with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do what your hand and [your] will had long ago planned to take place. And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and enable your servants to speak your word with all boldness, as you stretch forth [your] hand to heal, and signs and wonders are done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.’ As they prayed, the place where they were gathered shook, and they were all filled with the holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” **Rom 8:26** “In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit itself intercedes with inexpressible groanings.”

**Rom 12:12** “Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer.”

**1 Cor 14:14-15** “[For] if I pray in a tongue, my spirit is at prayer but my mind is unproductive. So what is to be done? I will pray with the spirit, but I will also pray with the mind. I will sing praise with the spirit, but I will also sing praise with the mind.”

**Eph 6:18** “With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit. To that end, be watchful with all perseverance and supplication for all the holy ones.”

**Phil 4:6** “Have no anxiety at all, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests known to God.”

**Col 4:2** “Persevere in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

**1 Thes 5:16-18** “Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus.”

**1 Tm 2:1-3** “First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone, for kings and for all in authority, that we may lead a quiet and tranquil life in all devotion and dignity. This is good and pleasing to God our savior.”

**1 Tm 2:8** “It is my wish, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands, without anger or argument.”

**Jas 4:3** “You ask but do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.”

**Jas 5:16-18** “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The fervent prayer of a righteous person is very powerful. Elijah was a human being like us; yet he prayed earnestly that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain upon the land. Then he prayed again, and the sky gave rain and the earth produced its fruit.”

**Rv 2:7 (Mt 11:15)** “Whoever has ears ought to hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the victor I will give the right to eat from the tree of life that is in the garden of God.”

### **The Rule of St. Benedict**

**RB Prol:4-7** “First of all, every time you begin a good work, you must pray to him most earnestly to bring it to perfection. In his goodness, he has already counted us as his sons, and therefore we should never grieve him by our evil actions. With his good gifts which are in us, we must obey him at all times that he may never become the angry father who disinherits his sons, nor the dread lord, enraged by our sins, who punishes us forever as worthless servants for refusing to follow him to glory.”

**RB Prol:8-12** “Let us get up then, at long last, for the Scriptures rouse us when they say: It is high time for us to arise from sleep (Rom 13:11). Let us open our eyes to the light that comes from God, and our ears to the voice from heaven that every day calls out this charge: If you hear his voice today, do not harden your hearts (Ps 95:8). And again: You that have ears to hear, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches (Rv 2:7). And what does he say? Come and listen to me, sons; I will teach you the fear of the Lord” (Ps 34:12).

**RB Prol:16** “If you hear this and your answer is ‘I do,’ God then directs these words to you.”

**RB 4:55-58** “Listen readily to holy reading, and devote yourself often to prayer. Every day with tears and sighs confess your past sins to God in prayer and change from these evil ways in the future.”

**RB 22:6** “Thus the monks will always be ready to arise without delay when the signal is given; each will hasten to arrive at the Word of God before the others, yet with all dignity and decorum.”

**RB Prol:24** “After this question, brothers, let us listen well to what the Lord says in reply, for he shows us the way to his tent.”

**RB Prol:33** “That is why the Lord says in the Gospel: Whoever hears these words of mine and does them is like a wise man who built his house upon rock.”

**RB Prol:39** “Brothers, now that we have asked the Lord who will dwell in his tent, we have heard the instruction for dwelling in it, but only if we fulfill the obligations who live there.”

**RB 5:6** “Again, he tells teachers: Whoever listens to you, listens to me” (Lk 10:16).

**RB 16:1,3** “The Prophet says: Seven times a day have I praised you; for it was of these hours during the day that he said: Seven times a day have I praised you” (Ps 119:164).

**RB 16:5** “Therefore, we should praise our Creator for his just judgments at these times: Lauds, Prime, Terse, Sext, None, Vespers, Compline; and let us arise at night to give him praise” (Ps 119: 164, 62).

**RB 19:1-7** “We believe that the divine presence is everywhere and that in every place the eyes of the Lord are watching the good and the wicked (Prv 15:3). But beyond the least doubt we should believe this to be especially true when we celebrate the divine office. We must always remember, therefore, what the Prophet says: Serve the Lord with fear (Ps 2:11), and again, Sing praise wisely (Ps 47:8); and, In the presence of the angels I will sing to you (Ps 138:1). Let us consider, then, how we ought to behave in the presence of God and his angels, and let us stand to sing the psalms in such a way that our minds are in harmony with our voices.”

**RB 20** This chapter presents reverence in prayer.

**RB 38:1-4** These verses describe the responsibility of the reader.

**RB 42:1-8** These verses describe expected proper behavior after Compline (Night Prayer).

**RB 48:1-5, 10-13** These verses establish the hours for manual labor between periods of prayer according to the seasons of the year.

**RB 48:14-23** These verses describe the Lenten schedule for work and reading and give warning of wasting time and participating in idle talk which could result in punishment.

**RB 49:4** “This we can do in a fitting manner by refusing to indulge evil habits and by devoting ourselves to prayer with tears, to reading, to compunction of the heart and self-denial.”

**RB 52** This chapter describes the oratory and the appropriate behavior necessary to maintain a prayerful silence that respects others.

**RB 64:21** “So that when he has ministered well he will hear from the Lord what that good servant heard who gave his fellow servants grain at the proper time.”

**RB 73:3** “What page, what passage of the inspired books of the Old and New Testaments is not the truest of guides for human life?”

## Lesson 7: Liturgy of the Hours

### INTRODUCTION

Pax!

Some novices are very familiar with praying the Liturgy of the Hours while others are not as familiar with this beautiful prayer of the Church. This lesson will present insightful reflections that we hope will encourage, inspire, and deepen everyone's commitment to the praying of Liturgy of the Hours (daily, if possible).

May praying the Liturgy of the Hours strengthen and guide us to follow God's will at every moment in our lives. May we accept Christ's invitation in the Holy Spirit to join Him along with His Bride, the Church, and all the saints and angels in giving glory and praise to the Father forever!

May you find Christ's peace in your life with a right balance and a healthy rhythm of prayer and work, with the prayerful reading of Scripture and the Rule, with the study of lessons, with silent listening to God, and with your association with the Benedictine community of monks and affiliated Oblates.

*Lesson Seven presents the Liturgy of the Hours, also known as the Divine Office or Opus Dei (Work of God). The Liturgy of the Hours is the official prayer of the Church and gathers us as one in the Body of Christ to extend the Eucharistic Sacrifice and to sanctify the hours of the day.*

### 1. PRAYER

(This section provides the prayer that is prayed every night at the beginning of Vigils in our monastery along with Old and New Testament passages. There are more passages at the end of this document. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

*Come, O Holy Spirit, replenish the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your divine love.*

*Excite, O Lord, in your Church, the Spirit which our Most Holy Father, St. Benedict served; that filled with the same, we may study to love what he loved and practice what he taught. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*"A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit" (Ps 51:12).*

### **1.1 Old Testament Scripture**

“Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights. Praise him, all you his angels; give praise, all you his hosts. Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all shining stars. Praise him, highest heavens...kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all who govern on earth; young men and women too, old and young alike. Let them all praise the LORD’s name” (Ps 148:1-14).

### **1.2 New Testament Scripture**

“Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, everything in the universe, cry out: ‘To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever’” (Rv 5:13).

### **1.3 The Rule of St. Benedict**

“Upon hearing the signal for an hour of divine office, the monk will immediately set aside what he has in hand and go with utmost speed... Indeed, nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God” (RB 43: 1-3).

## **2. READINGS**

“Rejoice always. Pray without ceasing. In all circumstances give thanks, for this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus” (1 Thes 5:16-18).

### **2.1 A Living Sacrifice of Praise**

All living creation possesses a liturgical quality and makes a sweet surpassing song of praise as it naturally speaks and obeys God. God our Father gave us His Son to lead us in offering ourselves in worthy praise and thanksgiving to Him. The Divine Office, or Opus Dei (The Work of God), referred to the regular assembling of monks as they came together to pray at certain hours. Over time this came to be known as the Liturgy of the Hours. This official prayer of the Church as the Body of Christ opens us to union with Christ so that our whole lives may become a living sacrifice of praise.

### **2.2 The Eucharistic Liturgy (the Mass) and the Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours)**

The most powerful prayer is the Eucharistic Liturgy (the Mass), followed by the Liturgy of the Hours, which is the extension and amplification of the Eucharistic sacrifice. The Divine Office is first of all praise. It gives God glory directly and relates entirely to God. It is the expression of the Bride of Christ, which is the Church Herself. The doxology (Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit), which is placed at the end

of each psalm (or group of psalms), glorifies the Trinity. “Worthy are you, Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things; because of your will they came to be and were created” (Rv 4:11). Praying the Liturgy of the Hours is a great privilege, affirms our dignity in Christ, and makes something beautiful out of our human weaknesses.

### **2.3 The Jews Following of God’s Command to Pray**

Worship in every age is a very human act arising not only from faith but also from the cultural experiences of those who gather to pray. Before Christianity existed, devout Jews followed God’s command to pray by gathering in synagogues to pray in the morning and in the evening. Every verse of Psalm 119 speaks of love of God’s ordinances and expresses God’s desire for us to rise each morning with praise to Him, to mark times for continual prayer throughout the day, and to retire each night in thanksgiving for His love and care. The command to pray was meant not to be legalistic but instead to be the way to come to know and to love God. As a Jew, Jesus Christ followed His Father’s law of love to fulfillment in His crucifixion and death. As our Resurrected Lord, He now invites us to join Him in offering worthy prayers of praise and thanksgiving to the Father. Rather than the Old Testament offerings of animals and grain, in Christ we are called to offer ourselves to God as completely as possible.

### **2.4 The Early Church’s Gatherings for Eucharist and Prayer**

In the early Church, Christians gathered for the breaking of bread and prayers (Acts 2:42), and consecrated communities joined for set hours in praying the Divine Office. The psalms of the Old Testament made up a Christian prayer book that was saturated with Christ. The psalms were viewed as the prayers of Jesus to His Father and as the prayers of the people to Christ. Just as the psalms distilled the faith experience of the Israelites in the Old Testament, so also Christians made them the distillation of their own faith experience. The psalms were considered not to be predictions of the future but to be reflections on God’s definitive work in Jesus Christ. These Spirit-filled psalms were composed to be used by a variety of worshippers year after year in praise, love, repentance, and submission to God. The psalms of Israel give us words to bless God, to repent for our sins, to bear trouble and sorrow with courage, and to rejoice in community. Together with the occasional celebration of Vigils in preparation for great feast days, the celebration of the Eucharist became embedded in this rich and varied rhythm of daily and weekly prayer. The continual prayer to God at all times and seasons began in the psalms of the Jewish people, continued in the prayers of Jesus, and were the source of the contemplative prayer of Mary.

### **2.5 Liturgy of the Hours in the Third and Fourth Centuries**

St. Clement of Alexandria (150-215 A.D.) noted that some Christians also had the custom of praying at the third hour of the day, at the sixth hour of the day, and at the ninth hour of the day as found in the Book of Acts. These private prayers could also be prayed in common. The various hours were named and given relative significance, with Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer being the “hinge” hours of the day and regarded as more obligatory. Prayer before dawn became known as Matins, Vigils, or the Night Office; Morning Prayer became known as Lauds; Evening Prayer became known as Vespers; and the third, sixth and ninth hours became known as Terce, Sext, and None. Prayer at bedtime was known as Night Prayer, or Compline. Significant meaning was applied to these hours: Morning Prayer at dawn was associated with the Resurrection; the third hour was associated with the first preaching of the Gospel; the sixth hour was identified with Christ’s crucifixion; and the ninth hour was associated with Christ’s death. These reflections offered opportunities to enter more deeply into prayer.

In the fourth century, the desert fathers instituted a common liturgical celebration of morning and evening prayers. While early monastic tradition recited all 150 psalms in one day, in the cities the cathedral tradition, known as the People’s Office, invited lay people to join in celebrating Morning Prayer (Lauds) and Evening Prayer (Vespers). These hours usually consisted of a hymn, some psalms from the Old Testament, and readings from both the Old and New Testaments, along with silent prayer between the psalms. By the end of the fourth century, the Sunday Vigil of the Resurrection (watchful prayer in the middle of the night) was celebrated.

## **2.6 St. Benedict’s (480-547 A.D.) Organization of Liturgical and Monastic Prayer**

When St. Benedict organized liturgical and monastic prayer, he tried to arrange all things in accordance with God’s will. He recognized the Divine Office as essential and as the sustaining force to nurture constant praise to God in the midst of daily work. St. Benedict combined the two traditions of continual monastic prayer and the People’s Office to mark eight separate hours so that the monks could pray throughout the day, have time to accomplish their necessary tasks, and get sufficient sleep at night. For Benedictines, the Liturgy of the Hours has always been a central spiritual element and a response to the basic human need to pray often and to pray well. All was arranged to nurture communion with Christ at all times so that in every moment the monk could follow God’s will. “Indeed, nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God” (RB 43:3). “Through Him [then] let us continually offer God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name” (Heb 13:15).

## **2.7 Running with the Light of Life**

In the Rule, St. Benedict concluded his teaching on humility by writing: “Through this love, all that he [the monk] once performed with dread, he will now begin to observe without effort, as though naturally from habit, no longer out of fear of hell, but out of love for Christ, good habit and delight in virtue” (RB 7:68-69). Bishop Edward Malesic (Roman Catholic Diocese of Greensburg) mentioned that the praying of Morning Prayer should become as natural as the tying of one’s shoes each day. If shoes are tied improperly, there is great likelihood of falling; if shoes are tied well, one will be able to run! “Run while you have the light of life, that the darkness of death may not overtake you” (RB Prol:13; Jn 12:35).

Emphasizing the importance of prayer in the monastic community, St. Benedict devoted thirteen chapters to support, guide, and enrich the daily praying of the Divine Office throughout the seasons of the year and with respect to liturgical feast days (RB 8-20). He gave the abbot the responsibility of announcing the hours for the Work of God and prescribed that all should be done in “humility, seriousness and reverence, and at the abbot’s bidding” (RB 47:1-2). All of this was to help fulfill God’s ordinance: “The Prophet says: Seven times a day have I praised you” (RB 16:1; [Ps 119:164]). In fulfilling God’s command to pray always, we invite Christ to be in union with us at every moment of our lives.

## **2.8 The Theology of Liturgy of the Hours**

The theology of the Liturgy of the Hours asserts that Christ is our High Priest (Heb 4:14) and that God favors the offering of our hearts and our wills rather than the holocaust offerings of animals and grain (cf. Ps 40:7). “For this reason, when he came into the world, he said: ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; holocausts and sin offerings you took no delight in.’ Then I said, ‘As is written of me in the scroll, behold, I come to do your will, O God’” (Heb 10:5-10). Christ has a priesthood that does not pass away; “he is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25).

Dedicated and frequent praying of the Liturgy of the Hours allows the word of God to become engraved in our minds and hearts and leads us to imitate Christ in choosing God’s will. “Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work’” (Jn 4:34). When we pray the Liturgy of the Hours, we join with the angels and saints in heaven as they offer praise and adoration for all eternity. “Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, everything in the universe, cry out: ‘To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever’” (Rv 5:13). By praying the Liturgy of the Hours, we consecrate ourselves in union with Christ’s suffering and death

and with His promise of eternal life; and He unites our prayer with the endless praises of heaven.

### **2.9 Christ as Daystar and as Lighted Lamp (2 Pt 1:19)**

Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer celebrate Christ as “a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Pt 1:19). At dawn Morning Prayer (Lauds) conveys the notion of rebirth as we rejoice in our Resurrected Lord with a spirit of renewed dedication. It is a preparation that consecrates the day and all that happens during the day to the Lord. The psalms at Lauds are often joyful but also include psalms of repentance to purify our awakening hearts and to kindle in them a desire for God. Morning Prayer invites all of creation to praise God for the coming of light, especially the Light of Christ our Savior. At dusk Evening Prayer (Vespers) gives thanksgiving to God for the good that has come to us during the day and stirs us to repentance for the sins of the day. It ends with the Magnificat, the beautiful song of Mary, the Mother of God, which proclaims faith and praise to our God, who scatters the proud and lifts the lowly (Lk 1:46-55). Evening Prayer celebrates Christ’s continual presence as a lighted lamp through the darkness of the night, and our thanksgiving is rooted in His Passion and death, which gained salvation for us.

### **2.10 The Faithful’s Common Priesthood and the Necessity of Prayer**

In the parable of the persistent widow, Jesus told his apostles “about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary” (Lk 18:1-8). “With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit. To that end, be watchful with all perseverance and supplication for all the holy ones” (Ephes 6:18). In the fourth century St. John Chrysostom wrote of the prayers for the whole Church and for the world which were made at these hours in which the faithful exercised their common priesthood. All baptized Christians share in the common priesthood of Christ and are urged to nurture His own constancy, watchfulness, and perseverance in prayer with a spirit of thanksgiving (Col 4:2). As members united in Christ, we can also regard the Liturgy of the Hours as a prayer of intercession in the Holy Spirit for the whole Church and for the entire world. “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Mt 18:20).

### **2.11 Individuals and Groups**

Bishops, priests and deacons are obligated to pray the Liturgy of the Hours and are encouraged to introduce this communal prayer in parishes. When groups pray Liturgy of the Hours in their churches, when husbands and wives, and families pray it in their homes, or when one prays it alone, the prayer is with and for the whole Church.

Whatever the circumstances and whichever book or online source is used for the Liturgy of the Hours, some preparatory moments in recollection should first open our hearts to a sense of wonder, awe, and gratitude. A prayer intention may be added to serve as motivation for that hour. A slow reverent, attentive, and devout pace of recitation should be maintained to allow for the savoring of the words with short periods of sacred silence, especially between the psalms. If the Liturgy of the Hours is prayed in private, it is still prayed in Christ's presence and in union with the whole Church.

## **2.12 Praying the Liturgy of the Hours Based on the Four-Week Psalter**

The basic parts of Lauds and Vespers are: opening versicle, hymn, psalmody, Scripture reading, responsory, Gospel canticle, intercessions, the Lord's Prayer, concluding prayer, and dismissal. Religious communities may choose their own form in praying the Liturgy of the Hours; this choice accounts for diversity among communities. The four-week Psalter of the Liturgy of the Hours may be found in *Shorter Christian Prayer*, in *Christian Prayer*, in the four-volume *Liturgy of the Hours*, or in online sources. Booklets for group recitation may be printed from online sites. If one uses the four-volume breviary, which includes the Office of Readings along with special parts for many feast days, the *St. Joseph Guide for the Liturgy of the Hours* may be helpful in locating the appropriate pages. (*Christian Prayer* also has a version of the *St. Joseph Guide* to accompany it.) Marking the pages ahead of time is often beneficial. Whichever breviary source is used, it is important to remember that prayer should remain simple and not become complicated so as to be burdensome. If praying the hour becomes impossible, do remember that it is not obligatory for lay people. The important thing is to not get caught up in ourselves and to know that Christ makes up for any imperfections or weaknesses in our prayer. Pray with the understanding that the marked temporal hours of prayer (chronos) exist so as to help us enter into "sacred time" (kairos). "Hour" is not meant to refer to sixty minutes but to be a holy time set aside in sacred duty for renewed consecration to the Lord.

## **2.13 Second Vatican Council**

The Second Vatican Council revised the Divine Office and affirmed the importance of the Office for all Christians. The document on the liturgy reaffirms that the Church ceaselessly praises her Lord and intercedes for the salvation of the world through the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Hours is a splendid preparation for the Eucharistic celebration and radiates from it, for the hours celebrate the presence of Christ throughout the day. The Council went on to say that this Liturgy is "arranged so that the whole course of the day is made holy by the praise of God." The Liturgy of the Hours makes time holy since it is the very prayer in which Christ addresses the Father

in union with Christ's Body, the Church. As a group of believers we contemplate the mystery of salvation and pray for its fulfillment. Praying Liturgy of the Hours is one of the principal means by which we overcome the tendency to lose ourselves in the ordinary activities of daily life, in which we may forget our source and destiny in Christ and our call to live as Christians. Christ is truly present in Scripture as in the Eucharist, and there is always possible growth in the understanding of the realities that Scripture reveals to us. This growth happens through the meditation and study of believers who treasure these words in their hearts, as Mary did after the visit of the shepherds (Lk 2:19) and after the trip to the temple in Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old (Lk 2:51). The constant praying of the Liturgy of the Hours throughout the ages is a treasuring of the Word of God.

### **2.14 Concluding Thoughts on the Liturgy of the Hours**

Praying the Liturgy of the Hours helps us express our continuing lifelong search for God in communion with Christ and with the Church throughout the ages. Blessed Columba Marmion described the Liturgy of the Hours (*Opus Dei*) as the hymn of glory begun in the bosom of the Father. Our participation in the *Opus Dei* extends the saving grace of Christ to ourselves and to others as we strive together for habitual union with Christ. Daily praying of the Liturgy of the Hours teaches us to do all things in union with Christ, gives us a living knowledge of Scripture, provides a source for *lectio divina* afterward, and helps to redeem souls. It gives us the joy of being in possession of Christ, to some extent, and the hope of possessing Him more fully. It nurtures spiritual growth so that we may know and love God and surrender ourselves to Him. "I thank you, Lord, with all my heart, in the presence of the angels to you I sing" (RB 19:5; Ps 138:1). In his *Consecration to the Blessed Trinity* (December 25, 1908), Blessed Columba Marmion wrote: "United with Him, may we be carried into Your bosom, and be consumed in the unity of Your love."

## **3. SUMMARY**

### **3.1 A Living Sacrifice of Praise**

- A. All living creation possesses a liturgical quality in naturally praising God.
- B. God the Father gave us His Son to lead us in worthy praise and thanksgiving.
- C. The Divine Office, or *Opus Dei* (Work of God), referred to monks' assembling to pray at set hours.
- D. The Liturgy of the Hours is the official prayer of the Church.
- E. The Liturgy of the Hours nurtures communion with Christ and the capacity to make our entire lives a living sacrifice of praise.

### 3.2 The Eucharistic Liturgy (the Mass) and the Divine Office (Liturgy of the Hours)

- A. The Mass is the most powerful prayer.
- B. The Liturgy of the Hours is the extension and amplification of the Eucharistic sacrifice.
- C. The Divine Office gives God glory directly and relates entirely to God.
- D. It is the expression of the Bride of Christ, the Church.
- E. The doxology (Glory to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) ends each psalm (or group of psalms) to glorify the Trinity (cf. Rv 4:11).
- F. Praying the Divine Office is a great privilege, affirms our dignity in Christ, and makes something beautiful out of our human weaknesses.

### 3.3 The Jews Following of God's Command to Pray

- A. Devout Jews gathered in synagogues to pray in the morning and in the evening.
- B. Psalm 119 speaks of love of God's ordinances and the desire to praise Him always.
- C. God's command to pray was not seen as legalistic but as the way to come to know and to love Him.
- D. Jesus Christ fulfilled the Father's law of love in his crucifixion and death.
- E. Our Resurrected Lord invites us to follow Him and to offer ourselves completely to God.

### 3.4 The Early Church's Gatherings for Eucharist and Prayer

- A. The psalms formed the Christian prayer book that was saturated with Christ.
- B. The psalms were the prayers of Jesus to His Father and the prayers of the people to Christ.
- C. They were not predictions of the future but prophesied God's definitive work in Christ.
- D. The psalms gave voice to human desires to bless God, to repent from sins, to bear trouble and sorrow with courage, and to rejoice in community with praise, love, and submission to God.
- E. Continual prayer to God during all times and seasons began in the psalms of the Jewish people and in the prayers of Jesus.
- F. The contemplative prayer of Mary was undoubtedly rooted in the psalms.

### 3.5 Liturgy of the Hours in the Third and Fourth Centuries

- A. St. Clement of Alexandria (150-215 A.D.) noted that Christians prayed at the third, sixth, and ninth hours of the day in private and in common as found in the Acts of the Apostles.
  - B. The various hours were named and given relative significance.
    - 1. Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer were the “hinge” hours and were more obligatory.
    - 2. Prayer before dawn became known as Matins, Vigils, or the “Night Office.”
    - 3. Morning Prayer became known as Lauds.
    - 4. Evening Prayer became known as Vespers.
    - 5. The third, sixth, and ninth hours became known as Terce, Sext, and None.
    - 6. Night Prayer (before bedtime) became known as Compline.
  - C. Christ-centered meaning was given to the hours.
    - 1. Morning Prayer at dawn was associated with the Resurrection.
    - 2. The third hour was associated with the first preaching of the Gospel.
    - 3. The sixth hour was identified with Christ’s crucifixion.
    - 4. The ninth hour was associated with Christ’s death.
    - 5. These associations provided opportunities to enter more deeply into prayer.
  - D. The desert fathers instituted a common liturgical celebration with the tradition of reciting all 150 psalms in one day.
  - E. In the cities, the cathedral tradition (the People’s Office) invited lay people to join in celebrating Lauds and Vespers.
    - 1. These hours consisted of a hymn, OT psalms, and OT and NT Scripture readings.
    - 2. Silent prayer between the psalms was prescribed.
    - 3. At the end of the fourth century, the Sunday Vigil of the Resurrection (watchful prayer in the middle of the night) began.
- 3.6 St. Benedict’s (480-547 A.D.) Organization of Liturgical and Monastic Prayer
- A. St. Benedict saw all things as opportunities to do God’s will.
  - B. The Divine Office was the essential and sustaining force to nurture constant praise to God in midst of daily work.

- C. St. Benedict combined the monastic tradition and the cathedral tradition to mark eight hours of prayer.
  1. Monks could strive to pray throughout the day due to the eight “Hours” that punctuated the day.
  2. Time was allotted for necessary tasks to be accomplished.
  3. Sufficient hours for sleep were provided.
  4. In every moment the monk had an opportunity to remain in union with Christ and to follow God’s will (RB 43:3, Heb 13:15).

### 3.7 Running with the Light of Life

- A. St. Benedict ends his chapter on humility with encouragement for the monk to strive to pray in such a way that it becomes an effortless endeavor and an act of love (RB 7:68-69).
- B. The next thirteen chapters, along with later chapters, give guidance related to the abbot’s authority, the seasons of the year, liturgical feast days, and the importance of reverence and humility (RB 8-20; RB 47:1-2).
- C. Bishop Edward Malesic (Roman Catholic Diocese of Greensburg) likened the routine of praying the Liturgy of the Hours to the tying of shoes each morning.
  1. If shoes are tied improperly, there is great likelihood of falling.
  2. If shoes are tied well, you will be able to run!
  3. “Run while you have the light of life, that the darkness of death may not overtake you” (RB Prol:13; Jn 12:35).

### 3.8 The Theology of Liturgy of the Hours

- A. Jesus is our High Priest who, united with us, remains in heaven forever to make intercession to the Father (Heb 4:14; Heb 7:24-25).
- B. God favors the offering of our hearts and wills rather than the holocaust offerings of animals and grain (cf. Ps 40:7).
- C. The word of God becomes engraved in our minds and hearts.
- D. This leads us to imitate Christ in choosing God’s will over our own will (Jn 4:34).
- E. We join with the saints and angels in heaven as they offer praise and adoration for all eternity (cf. Rv 5:13).
- F. We consecrate ourselves in union with Christ’s suffering and death, treasure His promise of eternal life, and unite our prayers with the endless praises of heaven.

### 3.9 Christ as Daystar and as Lighted Lamp (2 Pt 1:19)

- A. At dawn Morning Prayer (Lauds) has the notion of rebirth as we rejoice with a spirit of renewed dedication.
  - 1. It is a preparation that consecrates the happenings of the day to the Lord.
  - 2. The psalms are generally joyful but there are also psalms of repentance to purify hearts and kindle a desire for God.
  - 3. All creation is invited to praise God for the coming of light, the Light of Christ our Savior.
- B. At dusk Evening Prayer (Vespers) gives thanksgiving to God for the day and offers repentance for the sins of the day; it also gives thanks for Christ's suffering and death.
  - 1. It ends with the Magnificat, which is the beautiful song of Mary's faith and praise to God (Lk 1:46-55).
  - 2. It celebrates Christ's continual presence as a lighted lamp through the darkness of night.

### 3.10 The Faithful's Common Priesthood and the Necessity of Prayer

- A. We are to pray in the Spirit at every opportunity and not become weary (cf. Lk 18:1-8; Eph 6:18).
- B. St. John Chrysostom wrote of the faithful exercising their common priesthood in Christ.
  - 1. Prayers for the Church and for the whole world should be made in the Liturgy of the Hours.
  - 2. All baptized Christians share in this call for constancy, watchfulness, and perseverance in prayer along with a spirit of thanksgiving (cf. Col 4:2).
  - 3. United in Christ, those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours intercede in the Holy Spirit for the whole Church and for the entire world; thus they share in Christ's redeeming work.

### 3.11 Individuals and Groups

- A. Bishops, priests, and deacons are obligated to pray the Liturgy of the Hours and to recommend communal prayer in their parishes.
- B. Parish groups, husbands and wives, and families may join together to pray for the whole Church.

- C. If prayed in private, the Hours are still prayed in Christ's presence and with the whole Church.
- D. Preparatory moments in recollection help to open our hearts to a sense of wonder, awe, and gratitude.
- E. An expressed intention (or a private intention in the heart) may be used as a motivation for praying a particular Hour.
- F. A slow, reverent, attentive, and devout pace of recitation with short periods of sacred silence should be maintained for the savoring of the psalms, readings, and prayers.

### 3.12 Praying the Liturgy of the Hours Based on the Four-Week Psalter

- A. The parts of Lauds and Vespers are: opening versicle, hymn, psalmody, Scripture reading, responsory, Gospel canticle, intercessions, the Lord's Prayer, concluding prayer, and dismissal.
- B. Diversity in form may exist among religious communities.
- C. Choose the source for praying Liturgy of the Hours as is most appropriate for you.
  - 1. Four-volume breviary
  - 2. One-volume breviary
  - 3. Printed booklets which are available for each Hour from online sites
  - 4. Online sources for computer or phone use
- D. If using a breviary, marking the appropriate pages before the time of prayer is helpful.
- E. Choose such a breviary that will render your prayer reasonably simple and not complicated as to become burdensome.
- F. If praying an hour becomes impossible, remember that it is not obligatory for lay people.
- G. Christ makes up for any defects or weaknesses in our prayer.
- H. The marked temporal hours (chronos) exist so as to help us to enter into "sacred time" (kairos).
- I. The word "hour" does not mean sixty minutes but a holy time set aside in sacred duty for renewed consecration to the Lord.

### 3.13 Second Vatican Council

- A. The Church ceaselessly praises her Lord and intercedes for the salvation of souls through the Liturgy of the Eucharist, during which we have the reality of Christ's presence.
- B. The Liturgy of the Hours is also the official prayer of the Church.
  - 1. It is a splendid preparation for the Eucharistic celebration and radiates from it.
  - 2. It makes time holy since it is the prayer in which Christ addressed the Father in union with Christ's Body, the Church.
  - 3. It contemplates the mystery of salvation and prays for its fulfillment.
  - 4. It helps to overcome the tendency to lose ourselves in daily activities and forget that our source and destiny is in Christ.
  - 5. Scripture reveals the realities of God and helps us to understand them.
  - 6. The constant praying of the Liturgy of the Hours throughout the ages is a treasuring of the word of God, just as Mary did after the visit of the shepherds (Lk 2:19) and after the trip to Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old (Lk 2:51).

### 3.14 Concluding Thoughts on the Liturgy of the Hours

- A. Praying the Liturgy of the Hours helps us express our lifelong search for God in communion with Christ and with the Church throughout the ages.
- B. The daily praying of Liturgy of the Hours:
  - 1. teaches us to do all things in union with Christ
  - 2. gives us a living knowledge of Scripture
  - 3. provides a source for lectio divina afterwards
  - 4. redeems souls
  - 5. gives us the joy of being in possession of Christ, to some extent, and the hope of possessing Him more fully
  - 6. nurtures spiritual growth so that we may know and love God and surrender ourselves to Him.
  - 7. is subservient to ordinary charitable duties
  - 8. may leave us with a sense of intrusion into our planned activities; if so, this disruption may be used as an offering to God.

C. Blessed Columba Marmion (Benedictine priest and monk 1858-1923)

1. described Liturgy of the Hours as the hymn of glory begun in the bosom of the Father.
2. stated that participation in Opus Dei extends the saving grace of Christ to ourselves and to others and leads to habitual union with Christ.
3. “United with Him, may we be carried into Your bosom, and be consumed in the unity of Your love” (Consecration to the Blessed Trinity, December 25, 1908).

#### **4. SUPPLEMENTARY READING**

##### **4.1 Conditions for Becoming an Oblate**

1. The person must have been an Oblate novice for a full year. (In certain situations, with the permission of the Director of Oblates, the period of time may be reduced by up to one month by reason of difficulty of travel or some other extenuating circumstance.)
2. The Oblate novice must have undertaken at least two practices as described under 4.2 below.
3. The Oblate novice must submit to the Director of Oblates a written summary, at least two paragraphs long, stating:
  - a. how he or she has grown as an Oblate novice and has undertaken the required practices (plus other recommended ones, if desired), and
  - b. how he or she hopes to continue to grow closer to Christ and the Church as a full Oblate.
4. The Oblate novice must participate in the authorized ceremony of Oblation including the Act of Oblation, with the approval of the Director of Oblates. At this ceremony one may choose to take on an “Oblate name,” which may be the name of any saint whose friendship and assistance one wishes to invoke on one’s journey of faith. This optional name has no legal status and is not normally used even in gatherings of Oblates but has personal significance in terms of one’s Oblate commitment. (Many Oblates opt for the name of a Benedictine saint; see 4.3 below.)

##### **4.2 Required/Recommended Practices for the Oblate Novitiate before Readiness for Final Oblation**

During the Oblate novitiate of a year or more, the Oblate novice should attest to having carried out (1) below, which is required of all, plus at least one of the other practices

listed under (2), over and above what he or she was doing before investiture as an Oblate novice.

1. Practice to be undertaken by all: studying and reading the Rule of St. Benedict at least weekly and trying to apply the passages to one's daily life; one should read the Rule reflectively as *lectio divina* and study it with the help of a commentary or at meetings with one's fellow Oblates. Note that the pocket-size translation by Leonard J. Doyle published by The Liturgical Press has a suggested reading for each day of the year. Also available online: [Access Daily Readings Here](#) (see RB 66:8)
2. Other recommended practices (fulfill at least one):
  - praying the Liturgy of the Hours (especially Morning and/or Evening Prayer) at least 3 days a week (with a monastic or parish community, with one's own family from a breviary, or alone from a breviary) (see RB 19:1-2)
  - practicing *lectio divina* at least 3 days a week (see RB 48:10-16, 22)
  - making a retreat of at least several days or making at least 3 days of recollection (see RB 49:1-3)
  - contributing in a significant way to a project that improves the natural environment for one's community or parish (see RB 31:10-12)
  - participating actively in a movement that works for peace and justice in one's local community, one's country, or the world (see RB Prol:14-17)
  - undertaking in a specific and regular way one of the spiritual or corporal works of mercy: instructing and advising in the ways of faith, consoling, comforting, forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently; feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, burying the dead (see Mt 25:31-46; RB 31:9, 4:14-19)
  - helping to build up one's parish family or civic community by concrete, regular involvement in a parish or community project (see RB 58:24- 25)
  - contributing one's services to Westminster Abbey, in a concrete way and over an extended period of time (see RB 72:7-12).

#### **4.3 Benedictine Calendar for Westminster Abbey and Partial List of Saints**

The following calendar consists of feasts of Benedictine saints and other saints related to monastic life, as well as other celebrations special to the Swiss-American Congregation, to which Westminster Abbey belongs, or special to Westminster Abbey itself.

Lesson 7: Liturgy of the Hours

2 Jan - Basil & Gregory Nazianzen (Memorial)  
15 Jan - Maurus and Placidus (Memorial)  
17 Jan - Anthony (Memorial)  
21 Jan - Agnes (Memorial)  
24 Jan - Francis de Sales (Memorial)  
25 Jan - Conversion St. Paul the Apostle (Feast)  
28 Jan - Thomas Aquinas (Memorial)  
31 Jan - John Bosco (Memorial)  
5 Feb - Agatha (Memorial)  
6 Feb - Paul Miki & Companions (Memorial)  
10 Feb - Scholastica (Feast)  
14 Feb - Cyril & Methodius (Memorial)  
21 Feb - Peter Damian (Memorial)  
23 Feb - Polycarp (Memorial)  
7 Mar - Perpetua & Felicity (Memorial)  
9 Mar - Frances of Rome (Memorial)  
19 Mar - Joseph, Spouse of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Solemnity)  
21 Mar - The Passing of our Blessed Father Benedict (Solemnity)  
7 April - John Baptist de la Salle (Memorial)  
11 April - Stanislaus (Memorial)  
21 April - Anselm (Memorial)  
25 April - Mark (Feast)  
29 April - Catherine of Siena (Memorial)  
1 May - Joseph the Worker (Solemnity)  
2 May - Athanasius (Memorial)  
3 May - Philip & James (Feast)  
11 May - Odo, Majol, Odilo, Hugh and Blessed Peter the Venerable (Memorial)  
14 May - Matthias (Feast)  
15 May - Pachomius (Memorial)

Lesson 7: Liturgy of the Hours

25 May - St. Bede the Venerable (Memorial)  
1 June - Justin (Memorial)  
3 June - Charles Lwanga & Companions (Memorial)  
5 June - Boniface (Memorial)  
11 June - Barnabas (Memorial)  
13 June - Anthony of Padua (Memorial)  
19 June - Romuald (Memorial)  
21 June - Aloysius Gonzaga (Memorial)  
24 June - The Nativity of St. John the Baptist (Solemnity)  
29 June - Peter and Paul (Solemnity)  
3 July - Thomas (Feast)  
11 July - Benedict (Feast)  
15 July - Bonaventure (Memorial)  
22 July - Mary Magdalene (Feast)  
25 July - James (Feast)  
26 July - Joachim and Anne (Memorial)  
29 July - Martha, Mary & Lazarus (Memorial)  
31 July - Ignatius of Loyola (Memorial)  
1 Aug - Alphonsus Liguori (Memorial)  
4 Aug - John Mary Vianney (Memorial)  
8 Aug - Dominic (Memorial)  
10 Aug - Lawrence (Feast)  
11 Aug - Clare (Memorial)  
20 Aug - Bernard (Memorial)  
21 Aug - Pius X (Memorial)  
24 Aug - Bartholomew (Feast)  
27 Aug - Monica (Memorial)  
28 Aug - Augustine (Memorial) .  
29 Aug - John the Baptist (Memorial)

## Lesson 7: Liturgy of the Hours

- 3 Sept - Gregory (Feast)
- 13 Sept - John Chrysostom (Memorial)
- 16 Sept - Cornelius and Cyprian (Memorial)
- 20 Sept - Andrew Kim Tae-gŏn, Paul Chŏng Ha-sang, and Companions (Memorial)
- 21 Sept - Matthew (Feast)
- 23 Sept - Pius of Pietrelcina (Memorial)
- 27 Sept - Vincent de Paul (Memorial)
- 29 Sept - Michael, Gabriel and Raphael, Archangels (Feast)
- 30 Sept - Jerome (Memorial)
- 1 Oct - Thérèse of the Child Jesus (Memorial)
- 4 Oct - Francis of Assisi (Memorial)
- 6 Oct - Bruno (Memorial)
- 15 Oct - Teresa of Jesus (Memorial)
- 17 Oct - Ignatius of Antioch (Memorial)
- 18 Oct - Luke (Feast)
- 19 Oct - John de Brébeuf, Isaac Jogues and Companions (Memorial)
- 28 Oct - Simon and Jude (Feast)
- 4 Nov - Charles Borromeo (Memorial)
- 10 Nov - Leo the Great (Memorial)
- 11 Nov - Martin (Feast)
- 16 Nov - Gertrude (Memorial)
- 22 Nov - Cecilia (Memorial)
- 24 Nov - Andrew Dũng-Lạc and Companions (Memorial)
- 30 Nov - Andrew (Feast)
- 3 Dec - Francis Xavier (Memorial)
- 13 Dec - Lucy (Memorial)
- 14 Dec - John of the Cross (Memorial)

## **5. SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES**

### **Guides to the Liturgy of the Hours**

Beginner's Guide to the LOTH 4 Volume set and the single volume Christian Prayer book. Downloadable guides that cover the various components of the prayer books, ribbon placement, and basic instructions for how to pray the different hours of the day.

**General Instructions on the Liturgy of the Hours (PDF):** Anyone who prays the Liturgy of the Hours really should read the General Instructions. It is the most comprehensive guide to the Church's teaching on the Liturgy of the Hours. You can find an abbreviated version in the single volume Christian Prayer book and the full text in volume 1 of the LOTH 4 volume set.

Fr Timothy Gallagher, **A Layman's Guide to the Liturgy of the Hours:** In this book Fr Timothy Gallagher provides helpful commentary on several Church documents on the Liturgy of the Hours, showing just how important the Liturgy of the Hours is in the life of the Church.

Daria Sockey, **The Everyday Catholic's Guide to the Liturgy of the Hours.**

Madeline Nugent, **The Divine Office for Dodos** (Catholic Book Publishing Corp.)

Fr. George Guiver, C.R., **Company of Voices: Daily Prayer and the People of God** (Pueblo)

A.M. Roguet, O.P., **The Liturgy of the Hours: The General Instruction with Commentary** (Liturgical Press)

Fr. Cyprian Smith, O.S.B., **The Path of Life** (Chapter 9) (Ampleforth Abbey Press)

Anne M. Field, O.S.B., **The Monastic Hours** (Trafalgar Square Books)

### **Podcasts about the Liturgy of the Hours**

How (and Why) to Pray the Liturgy of the Hours by Brandon Vogt and Fr. Blake Brittone

How to Pray the Liturgy of the Hours by Fr. Cassidy Stinson

Fr. Casey Cole, O.F.M. Listen to Fr. Casey's introduction to Liturgy of the Hours on his YouTube channel "Catholicism in Focus" at Praying the Liturgy of the Hours

Learn more about the Liturgy of the Hours from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' website here.

Read the article on "Praying with the Church Through the Liturgy of the Hours" and listen to Monsignor Stuart Swetland's 2 minute clip from his "Go Ask Your Father Podcast" encouraging all listeners to take up the Liturgy of the Hours at Relevant Radio.

## **Pray the Liturgy of the Hours with Online Aides**

**Universalis Website** (and access to free App trial) [here](#)

**Sing the Hours with Paul Rose:** Morning (Lauds) and Evening (Vespers) Prayer:

[Podcast from Apple](#)

[Spotify](#)

[YouTube channel](#) has visuals, including translations of the Latin parts

**iBreviary Website** [here](#)

**iBreviary Apps** [here](#)

**Divine Office.org** Website [here](#)

**DivineOffice.org** App (Android) [here](#)

**DivineOffice.org** App (iOS) [here](#)

**Laudate App** available at your preferred App store

## **Liturgy of the Hours Prayer Books**

*Christian Prayer: The Liturgy of the Hours.* International Commission on English in the Liturgy.

*One-volume version of the Liturgy of the Hours,* contains the complete texts of Morning and Evening Prayer for the entire year.

*The Liturgy of the Hours.* International Commission on English in the Liturgy: The complete set (4 Volumes) of the official English edition of the Liturgy of the Hours.

*Morning and Evening Prayer: with Night Prayer.* Collins, England.

*Benedictine Daily Prayer: A Short Breviary.* Liturgical Press. Monks of Saint John's Abbey. Edited by Maxwell E. Johnson.

*CTS Divine Worship Daily Office, Commonwealth Edition.* Ordinariates established by Anglicanorum Coetibus.

## **6. REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

This [link](#) provides an opportunity to share your responses to a few questions after you have read, reflected on and prayed over a lesson's topic. (It is not required to provide answers to the questions but Oblate Novices are encouraged to do so.)

## **Oblates & Genuine Conversion**

This section contains two factual questions; all answers are found in that lesson or pertain to it.

- 1. The Liturgy of the Hours is also known by two other names. What are they? In what way is the Liturgy of the Hours connected to the Eucharistic Liturgy (the Mass)?**
- 2. Why do we pray the Liturgy of the Hours? What blessings are received for ourselves and for others?**

## **Personal Conversion of Life**

This section contains your choice of one reflection question. Please reply to one of the following three questions (though you are welcome to reply to more than one, if you wish):

- 3. Briefly outline the historical development of the Liturgy of the Hours.**
- 4. Describe the individuals and groups who are invited to pray the Divine Office with Christ and His Body, the Church.**
- 5. Do you see ways to offer an invitation to pray Liturgy of the Hours to your family, your parish, or your friends?**

## **APPENDIX 7 – Additional Optional References for Lesson 7**

### **Full Texts of Scripture and Rule Verses**

(This section provides more passages from the Old and New Testament and the Holy Rule. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

### **Old Testament Scripture**

**Ps 148:1-14** “Praise the LORD from the heavens; praise him in the heights. Praise him, all you his angels; give praise, all you his hosts. Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all shining stars. Praise him, highest heavens...kings of the earth and all peoples, princes and all who govern on earth; young men and women too, old and young alike. Let them all praise the LORD’s name.”

**Ps 5:3-4** “Attend to the sound of my cry, my king and my God! For to you I will pray, LORD; in the morning you will hear my voice; in the morning I will plead before you and wait.”

**Ps 42:9** “By day may the LORD send his mercy, and by night may his righteousness be with me! I will pray to the God of my life.”

**Ps 51:17** “Lord, you will open my lips; and my mouth will proclaim your praise.”

**Ps 55:17-18** “But I will call upon God, and the LORD will save me. At dusk, dawn, and noon I will grieve and complain, and my prayer will be heard.”

**Ps 57:8-10** “My heart is steadfast, God, my heart is steadfast. I will sing and chant praise. Awake, my soul; awake, lyre and harp! I will wake the dawn. I will praise you among the peoples, Lord; I will chant your praise among the nations.”

**Ps 59:17-18** “But I shall sing of your strength, extol your mercy at dawn, for you are my fortress, my refuge in time of trouble. My strength, your praise I will sing; you, God, are my fortress, my loving God.”

**Ps 63:7-9** “I think of you upon my bed, I remember you through the watches of the night. You indeed are my savior, and in the shadow of your wings I shout for joy. My soul clings fast to you; your right hand upholds me.”

**Ps 88:2** “LORD, the God of my salvation, I call out by day; at night I cry aloud in your presence.”

**Ps 88:14** “But I cry out to you, LORD; in the morning my prayer comes before you.”

**Ps 89:2, 37-38** “I will sing of your mercy forever, LORD proclaim your faithfulness through all ages. ‘His dynasty will continue forever, his throne, like the sun before me. Like the moon it will stand eternal, forever firm like the sky!’”

**Ps 92:2-4** “It is good to give thanks to the LORD, to sing praise to your name, Most High, to proclaim our love at daybreak, your faithfulness in the night, with the ten-stringed harp, with melody upon the lyre.”

**Ps 110:3** “Yours is princely power from the day of your birth. In holy splendor before the daystar, like dew I begot you.”

**Ps 119** with highlights on:

**Ps 119:55** “Even at night I remember your name in observance of your law, LORD.”

**Ps 119:62** “At midnight I rise to praise you because of your righteous judgments.”

**Ps 119:147** “I rise before dawn and cry out; I put my hope in your words.”

**Ps 119:164** “Seven times a day I praise you because your judgments are righteous.”

**Ps 130:5-8** “I wait for the LORD, my soul waits and I hope for his word. My soul looks for the Lord more than sentinels for daybreak. More than sentinels for daybreak, let Israel hope in the LORD, for with the LORD is mercy, with him is plenteous redemption, and he will redeem Israel from all its sins.”

**Ps 141:2** “Let my prayer be incense before you; my uplifted hands an evening offering.”

**Ps 143:8** “In the morning let me hear of your mercy, for in you I trust. Show me the path I should walk, for I entrust my life to you.”

**Is 26:9** “My soul yearns for you at night, yes, my spirit within me seeks you at dawn.”

**Dn 6:11** “Even after Daniel heard that this law had been signed, he continued his custom of going home to kneel in prayer and give thanks to his God in the upper chamber three times a day, with the windows open toward Jerusalem.”

**Wis 16:28** “To make known that one must give you thanks before sunrise, and turn to you at daybreak.”

### **New Testament Scripture**

**Rv 5:13** “Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, everything in the universe, cry out: ‘To the one who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor, glory and might, forever and ever.’”

**Lk 1:10-11** “Then, when the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of the incense offering, the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense.”

**Lk 6:12** “In those days he departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God.”

**Lk 18: 1** “Then he told them a parable about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary.”

**Acts 2:1, 4, 15** “When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. ‘These people are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning.’”

**Acts 2:42** “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.”

**Acts 3:1** “Now Peter and John were going up to the temple area for the three o’clock hour of prayer.”

**Acts 10:3** “One afternoon about three o’clock, he saw plainly in a vision an angel of God come in to him and say to him, ‘Cornelius.’”

**Acts 10:9** “The next day, while they were on their way and nearing the city, Peter went up to the roof terrace to pray at about noontime.”

**Acts 10:30** “Cornelius replied, ‘Four days ago at this hour, three o’clock in the afternoon, I was at prayer in my house when suddenly a man in dazzling robes stood before me.’”

**Acts 16:25-26** “About midnight, while Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God as the prisoners listened, there was suddenly such a severe earthquake that the foundations of the jail shook; all the doors flew open, and the chains of all were pulled loose.”

**Eph 6:18** “With all prayer and supplication, pray at every opportunity in the Spirit. To that end, be watchful with all perseverance and supplication for all the holy ones.”

**Col 4:2** “Persevere in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

**1 Thes 1:2-4** “We give thanks to God always for all of you, remembering you in our prayers, unceasingly calling to mind your work of faith and labor of love and endurance in hope of our Lord Jesus Christ, before our God and Father, knowing, brothers loved by God, how you were chosen.”

**Heb 13:15** “Through him [then] let us continually offer God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name.”

**Jas 4:7-8** “So submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.”

**2 Pt 1:19** “Moreover, we possess the prophetic message that is altogether reliable. You will do well to be attentive to it, as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”

**Rv 4:11** “Worthy are you, Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things; because of your will they came to be and were created.”

**Rv 8:3-4** “Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a gold censer. He was given a great quantity of incense to offer, along with the prayers of all the holy ones, on the gold altar that was before the throne. The smoke of the incense along with the prayers of the holy ones went up before God from the hand of the angel.”

## **The Rule of St. Benedict**

**RB 43:1-3** “Upon hearing the signal for an hour of divine office, the monk will immediately set aside what he has in hand and go with utmost speed... Indeed, nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God.”

**RB Chapters 8-20** These chapters describe: the Divine Office at night; the number of psalms in the Night Office; the arrangement of the Night Office in summer; the celebration of Vigils on Sunday; the celebration of the solemnity of Lauds; the celebration of Lauds on ordinary days; the celebration of Vigils on the anniversaries of saints; the times for saying Allelulia; the celebration of the Divine Office during the day; the number of psalms to be sung at Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline; the order of the Psalmody; the discipline of Psalmody; reverence in prayer.

**RB 16:1** “The Prophet says: Seven times a day have I praised you (Ps 119:164).”

**RB 18:1** “Each of the day hours begins with the verse, God, come to my assistance; Lord, make haste to help me (Ps 70:2).”

**RB 18:22-25** These verses encourage the monks to say the full complement of 150 psalms every week.

**RB 19:1-7** These verses describe the proper attitude which should accompany the celebration of the divine office.

**RB 22:6** “...be ready to arise without delay when the signal is given; each will hasten to arrive at the Work of God before the others, yet with all dignity and decorum.”

**RB 42** This chapter encourages the commitment to silence after Vespers each evening and to cultivate silence especially at night.

**RB 47:1-2** This chapter explains the abbot’s care for announcing the hour for the Work of God, authorizing those who are to lead psalms, and the importance of humility, seriousness, and reverence.

**RB 50:1-4** This chapter instructs monks to perform the Work of God where they are when they are too far away to return to the oratory for prayer.

**RB 58:6-8** The senior monks should consider the eagerness for the Work of God shown by novices.

## Lesson 8: Culmination of Worship: The Eucharist

### INTRODUCTION

Pax!

This lesson presents the source and summit of Christian life: The Culmination of Worship: the Eucharist. Although explanation and teaching is helpful, the depth and full meaning of the Eucharist simply cannot be presented in one lesson in this very limited way.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (especially the sections “The Celebration of the Christian Mystery,” #1066-1209, and “The Sacrament of the Eucharist,” #1322-1419) provides for a clear and rich understanding of the Eucharist as found in Scripture, theology, doctrine, and magisterial teaching.

If you feel drawn to call on the saints, a small inspirational book that offers some of their reflections is *Source and Summit: Six Great Spiritual Guides Talk About the Eucharist* by Fr. Joel Giallanza, C.S.C.

There are also many other well-written books and recordings which invite us to draw closer to our Eucharistic Lord. Some of these are found in the listing of sources at the end of the lesson and also in the suggested readings.

The best way to come to a better understanding of Eucharist is to allow ourselves to be gathered with others in the Holy Spirit, to “open the ears of our hearts” to the great love shown by the Father through the Son, and to allow ourselves to be changed by Christ’s real presence. Christ invites us to the Eucharistic table. He provides us with the Bread of Life – His Body and His Blood - which nourishes us with grace to love God above all things more fully and to show more charity to others in our daily lives.

Our participation in the Eucharistic celebration, which is our sharing in Christ’s Paschal Mystery, is to be realized in our minds, hearts, and souls – and lived!

*Lesson Eight will consider the source and summit of the Christian life: the Eucharist celebration.*

### 1. PRAYER

(This section provides the prayer that is prayed every night at the beginning of Vigils in our monastery along with Old and New Testament passages. There are more passages at the end of this document. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few

Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

*Come, O Holy Spirit, replenish the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your divine love.*

*Excite, O Lord, in your Church, the Spirit which our Most Holy Father, St. Benedict served; that filled with the same, we may study to love what he loved and practice what he taught. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*“A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit” (Ps 51:12).*

### **1.1 Old Testament Scripture**

“Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was a priest of God Most High. He blessed Abram with these words: ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who delivered your foes into your hand’” (Gen 14:18-20).

### **1.2 New Testament Scripture**

“And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God” (Jn 1:14,12).

### **1.3 The Rule of St. Benedict**

“Therefore we intend to establish a school for the Lord’s service... (for) the good of all concerned...(a) road that leads to salvation. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love... (and) through patience share in the sufferings of Christ so that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom. Amen.” [RB Prol: 45-50]

## **2. READINGS**

*“Take and eat; this is my body. Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant. Do this in memory of me” (Mt 26:26-28, Lk 22:19).*

### **2.1 The Eucharist is the Source and Summit of the Christian Life (CCC, #1324)**

The Eucharist is the “source and summit of the Christian life” (CCC, #1324). It is the culmination of Christian life and worship, the source of spiritual strength, and union with God. The Eucharist (eucharistia in Greek; *todah* in Hebrew) is expressed in word and action as one sacrifice that includes obedience, reconciliation, thanksgiving,

praise, and the renewal of covenant promises. It includes an offering of unleavened bread and wine accompanied with words and the sharing of a meal. (The Mass has two parts: the Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist). It is first of all Christ's sacrifice to the Father centered in the depths of the Paschal Mystery: Jesus Christ's Passion, Death, and Resurrection. It is also the wedding feast of the Lamb and His Bride, the Church, who has made Herself ready (Rv 19:7). The Eucharist also involves the whole Trinity; it gathers us in the Holy Spirit and celebrates the eternal love of the Son for the Father, and the love of the Father for the Son. (See also "The Celebration of the Christian Mystery," CCC, #1066-1209; "The Sacrament of the Eucharist" CCC, #1322-1419).

## **2.2 The Old Testament Prepared God's People for the Bread of Eternal Life**

The Old Testament shows us how God prepared his people for the coming of Christ and for our receiving Him as the Lamb of God, the Bread of Eternal Life. Melchizedek, king and priest, offered a sacrifice of bread and wine to God in the blessing of Abraham after his victory over the kings (Gen 14:18-20). Abraham, the Patriarch of Israel, entered into a covenant with God after being tested in obedience and faith when God asked him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. God instead provided a lamb for the sacrifice and promised Abraham that he would make his descendants as "countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore" (Gen 22:8-18). In the Book of Exodus, the Israelites were commanded to celebrate the Passover of the Lord. The blood of a sacrificial lamb was applied to the lintels and doorposts of the houses in which they hastily ate unleavened bread during their departure from Egypt (Ex 12:1-17).

## **2.3 "Behold, the Lamb of God, Who Takes Away the Sins of the World" (Jn 1:29)**

A lamb was considered to be a worthy sacrificial offering to God. In the New Testament St. John the Baptist declares: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). Jesus was recognized as the Paschal Lamb of the new Passover, who by His suffering, death on the Cross, and Resurrection brings about forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. We join in Christ's suffering and victory over sin and death in our Eucharistic celebration as participants in Christ's Paschal Mystery. United in Christ, we are placed in a period of time after the first Passover and in anticipation of the "final Passover of the Church in the glory of the Kingdom" (CCC, p.891). The Book of Revelation, the last book of the New Testament, points to the heavenly banquet which awaits us in our final homecoming.

"Let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place of your dwelling, that I may come to the altar of God, to God, my joy, my delight" (Ps 43:3-4). In the Old Testament, altars were built by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and those designated as priests to offer animal and grain sacrifices to God. These sacrifices expressed thankfulness, joy,

and sorrow and renewed God's covenant with His people. Altars provided a way for the people to approach God, to show their desire for communion with Him, and to express their need for His protection and care.

Rather than following the priestly line of the Levites, who sacrificed various forms of animal and grain offerings based on the law, Jesus followed in the order of Melchizedek in offering a sacrifice of bread and wine not by law but "by the power of a life that cannot be destroyed." Because of this, "It is testified: You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 7:15-17). Jesus gathered His apostles and gave Himself to them (and to us): "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:26-28; [cf Mk 14:22-24, Lk 22:19-20]). The Eucharistic celebration is above all a sacrifice of love beyond measure. In God's mercy, it is THE ONE SACRIFICE of atonement, adoration, and thanksgiving offered by the Church that embraces all of humanity and all of creation throughout all of history and for all eternity.

The author of Hebrews writes: "This we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm, which reaches into the interior behind the veil, where Jesus has entered on our behalf as forerunner, becoming high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 6:19-20). (Through St. Joseph, Jesus was considered to be of the tribe of Judah, not Levi.) The Church acclaims that "Christ crucified and risen (is) the one high priest of the true sanctuary, the same one who offers and is offered, who gives and is given" (CCC, #1137). He is at "one and the same time, and eminently, altar, priest, and victim" (Delatte, p.133).

#### **2.4 The Incarnation of Jesus Christ**

"And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14). The Incarnation speaks of Jesus' full humanity and full divinity; it speaks of God the Father's uniting Himself to creation in Jesus Christ. By our baptism in Christ, we are mystically united with God and become His adopted children. Through the Incarnation, all of humanity is invited to join in Christ's eternal self-sacrifice to the Father. We are encouraged by St. Paul, "I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1). United in faith, united in God and to one another, we gather as many members of Christ's Body to celebrate and to become partakers in His Passion, Death, and Resurrection.

#### **2.5 The Church as the Body of Christ**

Although each of us may be in different stages in the Christian journey, we are equally graced and gifted with Christ's Presence. The Eucharistic celebration allows us humbly

to offer, sacrifice, and surrender all of our personal feelings, expectations, strengths, and weaknesses – all that we are - with humility, with reverence, and in awe of God. The more we open ourselves up to this great invitation, the more we are able to receive, and the more intimate becomes our union with God. We are the Body of Christ, His Church. Let us be aware that “the Church is His beloved Bride who calls to her Lord and through him offers worship to the eternal Father” (CCC, #1089).

The Jewish people and the first Christian communities understood that the sharing of food was the sharing of their lives. Many Jewish leaders found disfavor in Jesus’ eating with sinners because that action was understood to be the sharing of His life with them in a real way. We gather at the Eucharistic table to share in eternal food and in Christ’s life in a real way. Although we are still a pilgrim people on our Christian journey home, at the Eucharistic table we become one with Christ, one with all those who gather with us, and one with the saints in heaven. It is good for us to come forward to this eternal banquet with great eagerness and to remember St. Augustine’s words: “We become what we receive.”

The American Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy expressed it in this way: “We assemble together at Mass to speak our faith over and over again in community, and, by speaking it, to renew and deepen it. We do not come together to meet Christ as if he were absent from the rest of our lives. We come together to deepen our awareness and commitment to the action of his Spirit in the whole of our lives at every moment. People in love make signs of love and celebrate their love for the dual purpose of expressing and deepening their love. We, too, must express signs of our faith in Christ and in each other, our love for Christ and each other – or they (faith and love) will die. We need to celebrate.”

Celebration is a human action which commemorates, honors, and marks significant events in history. When we gather to celebrate the Eucharist, we come together to give glory, laud, and honor to God (Ps 117:1). We center ourselves in a deeper awareness of the spiritual reality that is present before us: the Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity of Christ. We do not remember a past event or person as being locked in history or a future event or promise that is beyond our capacity to reach. We simply follow Jesus’ commands at the Last Supper: “Take and eat; this is my body. Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant. Do this in memory of me” (Mt 26:26-28, Lk 22:19).

It serves us well to consider the common elements of bread and wine which form our sacred feast. The bread has been created by the grinding of many grains of wheat, and the wine has been produced by the crushing of many grapes. With God’s grace we, as many individuals with our varied experiences, personal joys and sufferings in life, join together as One Body in Christ to offer ourselves to God and to invite Him into our hearts. Christ invites and personally welcomes each one of us to this eternal banquet: “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door,

[then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me” (Rv 3:20). If we humbly open “the ear of our heart” (RB Prol 1), we allow God to transform us in His love. To welcome Christ, we need to set aside, to “grind and crush” our selfish pride along with any grudges held against others, so that we may offer Christ a worthy home in our hearts. In His mercy we are able to do this, to open wide the door to Christ so that he may rest on the altars of our hearts. This humble surrender to the Holy Spirit is the deepest form of prayer (cf. St. Anthony of Egypt, Abbot and Desert Father).

When we approach the altar, it is necessary for us to realize who we are and Who we are approaching. May our hearts be filled with a deep yearning as expressed in Ps 42:2-3: “As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God.” In the beginning of the Eucharistic celebration, we are asked to reflect on our sinfulness and we ask for God’s mercy as in Ps 51:3: “Have mercy on me, God, in accord with your merciful love; in your abundant compassion blot out my transgressions.” We then listen to the words of Scripture. Trusting in God’s mercy we move forward to place our offerings before God. During the Liturgy of the Eucharist, through the words and actions of the priest, God is truly present before us under the appearance of bread and wine. The Catholic Church calls this transformation of substance from bread and wine to the Body and Blood of Christ “transubstantiation.”

“Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb. Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof; but only say the word and my soul shall be healed” (Communion Rite, cf Jn 1:29, Mt 8:8). We are not perfect beings. We will always be lacking and imperfect and in need of God’s mercy. God asks us to do what is possible to change all that we can, to accept what we cannot change, and above all, to trust Him completely in all. This prayer recited immediately before receiving Holy Communion is saturated with faith, hope, and trust in God. It echoes the words of the centurion who asked Jesus to heal his servant. Jesus was amazed at such faith and said to him: “You may go; as you have believed, let it be done for you” (Mt 8:10,13).

## **2.6 What Are Some Ways to Prepare Ourselves for Worthy Participation in the Eucharist Celebration?**

To prepare ourselves well for receiving Christ, it is good for us to arrange our schedules so that one is not rushed before or after the Eucharistic celebration. Developing good relationships with other active Christians, reading Church documents, and listening to spiritually enriching programs help us to grow closer to Christ. It is important for Christians to seek reconciliation, to sustain a life of prayer, to study the Bible, to practice lectio divina, and to perform acts of charity. Reception of the Eucharist “sometimes produces little fruit” because we set charity aside. Just as the “Eucharist is an extension of the Incarnation, so our neighbor is an extension of the Eucharist”

(DeLatte, p. 66). St. Benedict guided his monks to enter into the Paschal Mystery and to keep it alive in their hearts and in their community life. “For in truth the act of charity which embraces God, ourselves, and our neighbor, is but one; we love God for Himself, ourselves for His sake, our neighbor because he is His and in Him. Our Lord regards Himself as the one really benefited by our charity” (DeLatte, p. 66, cf. Mt 25:40 and RB 4).

### **2.7 Where is mention of the Eucharist found in St. Benedict’s Rule?**

Theological teaching on the Eucharist is not included in St. Benedict’s Rule because the Rule’s purpose was to provide rules and guidance to foster holiness, unity, and loyalty among the members under the authority of Christ. The Rule was written to provide spiritual and physical care for all monks and to establish a healthy order and balance in all things. Therefore, the Rule provided an excellent preparation for Mass and Holy Communion. Centered in the Eucharist, the monks were transformed in Christ and strengthened in common brotherhood and charity.

In the Rule, Holy Communion and Mass are mentioned as occurring on Sundays and feast days but there is no mention of Mass on weekdays (DeLatte, p. 314). After Mass and Communion the reader asked all to pray for him (RB 38:2). Compassion was shown for the reader in offering him some diluted wine before he began reading to help his hunger “because of holy Communion and because the fast may be too hard for him to bear” (RB 38:10). “Kitchen officials were not to take advantage of the merciful provision of the Rule to omit Holy Communion or to break the fast” (DeLatte, p. 257, cf. RB 35).

St. Benedict also required a strict examination of ordained priests who asked to be received into the monastery; if they were admitted, the only privileges that they were granted were to stand next to the abbot, to give blessings, and to celebrate Mass (RB 60:4). He established a hierarchical order for the monks based on the time of their conversion, on the merit of their lives, or on the abbot’s appointment. This order was followed when the monks approached the altar for the kiss of peace and to receive Holy Communion (DeLatte, p. 433, cf. RB 63:1-5). These rules safeguarded the monks and insured the integrity of the Eucharistic celebration.

As God’s laborers are called and listen to His call, we are to “open our eyes to the light that comes from God, and our ears to the voice from heaven that every day calls” us (RB Prol 8-21). Through the words and actions of the Eucharistic celebration, our minds and hearts begin to penetrate the mystery of WHAT is being enacted and WHO is present before us and in us. With God’s grace and by our willing participation, we are lovingly transformed to be more Christ-like so that our very being and all that exists in our lives become sanctified and offered to God. In this way, Eucharist carries us into a deeper loving union with God and extends beyond ourselves to allow for the

transformation of the world in Christ. St. Benedict reminded the monks being received into community that their whole monastic life should reflect their Profession Mass when “silent like a Lamb of God, the newly professed suffers himself to be immolated and consumed mystically by the Eternal High Priest” (DeLatte, p. 401-402, cf. RB 58:17-29).

## **2.8 How Do the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours (Divine Office), Lectio Divina, and the Eucharistic Real Presence Relate to Each Other Today?**

It is important for us today to realize that the Mass includes the Liturgy of the Word as well as the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The reading of the Scriptures is not confined to the private practice of lectio divina but also is included in the public celebration of the Mass and of the Liturgy of the Hours. Christ is the Word of God, who is present and who is speaking to us through the word of Scripture at Mass and at the Divine Office. Also, there is a long tradition that speaks of the Liturgy of the Hours as a sacrifice of praise. The Divine Office is also liturgy, and it extends the grace of Christ’s presence from the Mass through all the hours of the day. Attentiveness to the word of God proclaimed at Mass forms an important part of Benedictine spirituality and very much complements devotion to Christ in the Eucharistic Real Presence.

At our baptism, we became members of the common priesthood of Christ. We continue to be invited to become one with Christ, to be transformed, and to reflect His presence to others. It is God whom we receive; it is God whom we are to recognize in others; and it is God whom we are to share with others. If we cherish Christ’s Eucharistic Presence and carry the words of Scripture in our minds and hearts, we will become instruments of salvation for the world. Let us call upon Jesus Christ and pray for one another since we are all beginners in this great and holy endeavor (cf. RB 73:8).

“Jesus is always able to save those who approach God through him, since he lives forever to make intercession for them. It was fitting that we should have such a high priest: holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners, higher than the heavens. He has no need, as did the high priests, to offer sacrifice day after day, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did that once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints men subject to weakness to be high priests, but the word of the oath, which was taken after the law, appoints a son, who has been made perfect forever. The main point of what has been said is this: we have such a high priest, who has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle that the Lord, not man, set up. Now every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; thus the necessity for this one also to have something to offer. If then he were on earth, he would not be a priest, since there are those who offer gifts according to the law. They worship in a copy and shadow of

the heavenly sanctuary, as Moses was warned when he was about to erect the tabernacle. For God says, ‘See that you make everything according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’ Now he has obtained so much more excellent a ministry as he is mediator of a better covenant, enacted on better promises” (Heb 7:25-8:6).

### 3. SUMMARY

#### 3.1 The Eucharist is the Source and Summit of the Christian Life (CCC, #1324)

- A. It is the culmination of Christian life and worship.
- B. It is the source of the Church’s life and offers union with God.
- C. It consists of word and action as one sacrifice of obedience, reconciliation, thanksgiving, and praise, and as a renewal of covenant promises.
- D. It is the sharing of a sacred meal; we receive Christ’s Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity in the form of unleavened bread and wine.
- E. It is the memorial of Christ’s Passion, Death, and Resurrection.
- F. It is the wedding feast of the Lamb and His Bride, the Church (Rv 19:7).
- G. In the Eucharist, the Holy Spirit gathers us to celebrate the eternal love of the Son for the Father, and the love of the Father for the Son.
- H. It is the Church’s greatest act of sacramental sacrifice: thanksgiving and praise to the Father, the sacrificial memorial of Christ and His Body, and the real presence of Christ.
- I. It is our communion with the heavenly liturgy and our anticipation of eternal life.
- J. It speaks of the Incarnation (Jesus’ full humanity and full divinity) whereby God the Father unites Himself to creation in Jesus Christ.

#### 3.2 The Old Testament Prepared God’s People for the Bread of Eternal Life

- A. The psalms speak of approaching the holy mountain, the place of God’s dwelling, so that the people could come to the altar of God, who was their delight (Ps 43:3-4).
- B. Altars were built for animal and grain sacrifices, burnt and bloody offerings.
- C. The sacrifices provided a way for the people to approach God, to show communion with Him, to express their need for His protection and care, and to renew the covenant.
- D. Sacrifices expressed thankfulness, joy, sorrow, and renewal of the covenant with God.

- E. Altars allowed a certain approach to God. The sacrifices aimed at communion with Him and involved asking for protection and care.
- F. Melchizedek offered bread and wine to God and blessed Abraham (Gen 14:18-20).
- G. A lamb was considered a worthy sacrifice to the Lord.
- H. The testing of Abraham's faith, his obedience in following God's command in readiness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, and God's sparing of Isaac by providing a lamb foreshadowed Christ's coming. God blessed Abraham's obedience and faith by promising to make his descendants as "countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore" (Gen 22:8-18).
- I. God commanded that the blood of the sacrificial lamb be applied to the lintels and doors of the houses while God's people hastily ate the unleavened bread of the Passover (Ex 12:1-17).
- J. The author of Hebrews wrote of Jesus Christ as an anchor of the soul reaching into the interior behind the veil and becoming high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek (Heb 6:19-20).

### 3.3 "Behold, the Lamb of God, Who Takes Away the Sins of the World" (Jn 1:29)

- A. Jesus was recognized as the Paschal Lamb of the new Passover, who by His suffering, death on the Cross, and Resurrection brings about forgiveness of sins and life everlasting.
- B. At the Passover meal, Jesus gave His Body and Blood to his apostles to offer them a share in His own sacrificial death and His Resurrection.
- C. "Take and eat: this is my body. Drink from it: this is my blood of the covenant. Do this in memory of me" (Mt 26:26-28; Mk 14:22-24; Lk 22:19-20).
- D. Jesus Christ is at one and the same time, and eminently, altar, priest, and victim. (Delatte, p. 133).
- E. This one sacrifice offered by the Church embraces all of humanity and all of creation for all eternity.

### 3.4 The Incarnation of Jesus Christ

- A. "And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (Jn 1:14).
- B. Jesus Christ is fully human and fully divine.
- C. By our baptism in Christ we share in a mystical union with God and are His adopted children.

- D. We are invited to become partakers in the Eucharist, the celebration of His Passion, Death, and Resurrection.
- E. We are to embrace our neighbor in charity because Christ is in him. “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt: 25:40).

### 3.5 The Church as the Body of Christ

- A. This celebration is not merely a ritual that we attend but one that shapes and transforms us as we freely surrender to Christ acting in it.
- B. St. Paul urges us to offer ourselves “as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God” (Rom 12:1).
- C. We must remember who we are and Who we are approaching.
- D. We do not remember someone or something “locked in the past” or a future event that is “beyond our capacity” to reach.
- E. We are all called to “full, conscious, and active participation” in union with the priest.
- F. United with the celebrating priest, we become ever more fully Christ’s Body.
- G. We need to “open the ears of our hearts” to share in Christ’s life (RB Prol 1).
- H. Our struggles, our “deaths,” are linked to Christ’s; life will come to us too as we share in His risen life.
- I. Each of us is graced and gifted with Christ’s real presence. We strengthen this presence when we receive Holy Communion.
- J. “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof; only say the word and my soul shall be healed” is a prayer saturated with faith, hope, and trust in God’s mercy.
- K. Our food and our drink is the Lord Himself; He transforms us into Himself.
- L. “We become what we receive” (St. Augustine).

### 3.6 What Are Some Ways to Prepare Ourselves for Worthy Participation in the Eucharist Celebration?

- A. Obey God’s commandments and abide by Church law.
- B. If needed, seek reconciliation with God and with our neighbor.
- C. Sustain a life of prayer.
- D. Study the Bible; practice lectio divina.

- E. Read Church documents, read Christian books, listen to CD's/DVD's; develop good relationships with other active Christians.
- F. Perform acts of charity.
- G. When possible, arrange schedules so that one is not rushed before or after the Eucharistic celebration.

### 3.7 Where is mention of the Eucharist found in St. Benedict's Rule?

- A. Eucharist was already the center and foundation of monastic life.
- B. The Rule's purpose was to foster holiness, unity, and loyalty under the authority of Jesus Christ.
- C. Holy Communion and Mass are mentioned as occurring on Sundays and feast days; there is no mention of Mass on weekdays (DeLatte, p. 314).
- D. As he begins his week of service on Sunday, after Mass and Communion, the reader asked all to pray for him (RB 38:2).
- E. Some diluted wine was offered to reader "because of holy Communion and because the fast may be too hard for him to bear" (RB 38:10).
- F. "Kitchen officials were not to take advantage of the merciful provision of the Rule to omit Holy Communion or to break the fast" (DeLatte, p. 257, RB 35).
- G. St. Benedict urges us to "open the ear of our heart" so that we may be transformed in God's love (RB Prol 1).
- H. Ordained priests who asked to be received in the monastery underwent a strict examination before being admitted. The only special privileges that they had were to celebrate Mass and to offer blessings (RB 60:1-5), should the abbot bid them.
- I. Monks approached the altar to exchange the kiss of peace and to receive Holy Communion based on the time of their entry into the monastery, the merit of their lives, or the abbot's appointment (RB 63:1-5).
- J. Although he does not mention the Eucharist frequently in the Rule, St. Benedict provides ways to ensure self-discipline and to allow for charity (RB 4), which are part of one's Eucharistic life.

### 3.8 How Do the Liturgy of the Word, the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the Liturgy of the Hours (Divine Office), Lectio Divina, and the Eucharistic Real Presence Relate to Each Other Today?

- A. The Mass includes the Liturgy of the Word and Liturgy of the Eucharist.
- B. The reading of Scriptures is not confined to the private practice of lectio divina but also is included in the public celebration of the Mass and of the Liturgy of the Hours.
- C. Christ is the Word of God, who is present and who is speaking to us through the word of Scripture at Mass and at the Divine Office.
- D. There is a long tradition that speaks of the Liturgy of the Hours as a sacrifice of praise. The Divine Office is also liturgy, and it extends the grace of Christ's presence from the Mass through all hours of the day.
- E. Attentiveness to the word of God proclaimed at Mass forms an important part of Benedictine spirituality and very much complements devotion to Christ in the Eucharistic Real Presence.

#### 4. SUPPLEMENTARY READING

##### 4.1 Glorifying God in All Things

In his chapter on the artisans of the monastery, St. Benedict urges that the monks should charge a little less for their products than the commercial world charges "so that in all things God may be glorified (1 Pt 4:11)" (RB 57:9). "*Ut in omnibus glorificetur Dei*" (UIOGD), the actual Latin phrase, has become another Benedictine motto, embodying monks' and Oblates' ardent desire to seek God, to praise Him, and to manifest His redeeming presence, His glory, in every dimension of life. Glorifying God means looking for His goodness in every person and situation and, in Christ, nurturing it. It means avoiding murmuring, gossip, and all that destroys or tears down. It means looking at every difficulty with eyes of faith, with hope in God's mercy, and with encouragement of others in their weakness. It means "blessing God and not murmuring" (RB 40:8), even when the redeeming quality of a situation is hidden; in faith we know that Christ is present to bring light out of darkness and to manifest the strength of His love in our weakness.

In his book *Households of God*, Abbot Parry comments, "Indeed, 'that God may be glorified in all things' is the key to human sanctity. For sanctity implies the exploitation of every human action and situation to God's glory. It is the secret demonstrated in the lives of the saints. The point is made here because buying and selling would seem to be the part of the monk's life nearest to the pattern of the ways of the world, and correspondingly remote from the service of praise. Hence the insistence that God is to be glorified in it -- not merely by a passing thought -- but by the entry of kindness and self-restraint into the deal itself. It is when God is glorified and praised and made part

of all life's transactions that life becomes rich, and progress is made in sanctity. Thus also is the dualism of dividing life simply into the sacred (directed to God alone) and the profane (at best useless, maybe worse) is avoided" (pp. 151-152).

#### **4.2 Other Elements of Benedictine Oblate Life Significant for Oblates - the Eucharist**

As Christians who know the value of liturgy, Oblates are careful to attend regular worship services in order to celebrate and intensify their union with Jesus Christ and their fellow Christians. Those Oblates who are Roman Catholic eagerly attend Mass, even daily if possible. A full, attentive participation in the Eucharist captures and capsulizes many other faith-moments in one's life and brings them to a new value in the light of Christ. Eucharist also makes us pass over into what we receive and energizes us to see our struggles, the many kinds of "death" that we suffer each day, as intimately connected with the death of Jesus Christ. His death gives us hope that life will come out of our "dying" in the sacrifices of each day, which become part of Christ's eternal sacrifice, offered out of love for us. The Eucharistic meal also gives us a longing for a greater share in Christ's life, as we hunger for completeness and strive to "hasten the day" (2 Pt 3:12) when "God will be all in all" (1 Cor 15:28).

### **5. SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES**

#### **Books**

David Parry, *Households of God: Rule of St. Benedict, with Explanations for Monks and Lay-people Today*, 1980 .

Sister M. Dolores Dowling, O.S.B., "*Instructions for Benedictine Oblates*," Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Tucson, AZ.

Right Rev. Paul Delatte, O.S.B., *Rule of St. Benedict: A Commentary, translated by Dom Justin McCann*, Forgotten Books, 2012 (Originally published by Burns, Oates & Washbourne, Ltd., London, 1921).

Fr. Cyprian Smith, O.S.B., *The Path of Life* (especially Chapter 8) (Ampleforth Abbey Press).

Scott W. Hahn, *The Lamb's Supper: The Mass as Heaven on Earth* (Doubleday).

Fr. Thomas Acklin, O.S.B., *The Passion of the Lamb* (Servant Books).

Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist: Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper* (Image Catholic Books).

Fr. Anselm Grün, O.S.B., *The Eucharist and Spiritual Growth* (Schuyler Spiritual Series Vol. 6), BMH Publications, 1993.

Br. Joel Giallanza, C.S.C., *Source and Summit: Six Great Spiritual Guides Talk About the Eucharist* (Alba House: Fathers and Brothers of the Society of St. Paul).

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, #1066-1209, #1322-1419), United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1994. (Also available online from United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [www.ccc.usccb.org](http://www.ccc.usccb.org)).

### **Podcasts**

The Passion Of The Lamb ....Conversation With Fr. Thomas Acklin O.S.B. at [Discerning Hearts](#)

### **YouTube**

Scott Hahn, *The Eucharist in Scripture: The Lamb's Supper, [Part 1](#)*

Scott Hahn, *The Eucharist in Scripture: The Lamb's Supper, [Part 2](#)*

Brant Pitre, [Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist](#)

[Communion, an Ever Present Reality](#), - Conference by Fr. Jay Kythe, Saint Benedict's Abbey in Atchison, KS.

Father Pio Adamonis, O.S.B., a monk of Saint Vincent Archabbey discusses [The Eucharist](#)

## **6. REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

This [link](#) provides an opportunity to share your responses to a few questions after you have read, reflected on and prayed over a lesson's topic. (It is not required to provide answers to the questions but Oblate Novices are encouraged to do so.)

### **Oblates & Genuine Conversion**

This section contains two factual questions; all answers are found in that lesson or pertain to it.

- 1. What words did Jesus use at the Last Supper when sharing the Passover meal with his apostles? When those same words are used by the celebrant in the Eucharistic Prayer today, what do they mean to you and the Church (the Body of Christ) today?**
- 2. How do Jesus' words at the Last Supper relate to what He did for us on Good Friday? How do the events of Holy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter**

**relate to our Eucharistic celebration today (the Mass)? How do Jesus' words relate to you?**

### **Personal Conversion of Life**

This section contains your choice of one reflection question. Please reply to one of the following three questions (though you are welcome to reply to more than one, if you wish):

- 3. Is there a way that you could better prepare yourself to participate more fully in the Eucharistic celebration? What would that way be?**
- 4. Which of the descriptions of the Eucharist as being the “source and summit” of Christian life have the most significance for you? Why?**
- 5. After receiving Christ in the Eucharist we are called to go forth into the world. How does the worthy reception of the Eucharist transform us? In what ways will this bring change to others?**

### **APPENDIX 8 – Additional Optional References for Lesson 8**

#### **Full Texts of Scripture and Rule Verses**

(This section provides more passages from the Old and New Testament and the Holy Rule. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

#### **Old Testament Scripture**

**Gen 14:18-20** “Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine. He was a priest of God Most High. He blessed Abram with these words: ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, the creator of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who delivered your foes into your hand.’”

**Gen 22:2, 8-9, 13, 15-18** “Then God said: Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There offer him up as a burnt offering on one of the heights that I will point out to you. ‘My son,’ Abraham answered, ‘God will provide the sheep for the burnt offering.’ Then the two walked on together. When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built an altar there and arranged the wood on it. Abraham looked up and saw a single ram caught by its horns in the thicket. So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son. The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven and said: ‘I swear by my very self—oracle of the LORD—that because you acted as you did in not withholding

from me your son, your only one, I will bless you and make your descendants as countless as the stars of the sky and the sands of the seashore; your descendants will take possession of the gates of their enemies, and in your descendants all the nations of the earth will find blessing, because you obeyed my command.”

**Ex 19:6** “You will be to me a kingdom of priests, a holy nation.”

**Ex 29:45** “I will dwell in the midst of the Israelites and will be their God.”

**Ps 23:5** “You set a table before me in front of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.”

**Ps 34:9** “Taste and see that the LORD is good.”

**Ps 42:2-3** “As the deer longs for streams of water, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God.”

**Ps 43:3-4** “Send your light and your fidelity, that they may be my guide; let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place of your dwelling, that I may come to the altar of God, to God, my joy, my delight.”

**Ps 63:2-4** “O God, you are my God—it is you I seek! For you my body yearns; for you my soul thirsts, in a land parched, lifeless, and without water. I look to you in the sanctuary to see your power and glory. For your love is better than life; my lips shall ever praise you!”

**Ps 63:6** “My soul shall be sated as with choice food, with joyous lips my mouth shall praise you!”

**Ps 110:4** “The LORD has sworn and will not waver: ‘You are a priest forever in the manner of Melchizedek.’”

**Ps 116:12-14** “How can I repay the LORD for all the great good done for me? I will raise the cup of salvation and call on the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people.”

**Is 28:28** “Grain is crushed for bread, but not forever.”

### **New Testament Scripture**

**Jn 1:14,12** “And the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of the Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God.”

**Mt 6:11** “Give us today our daily bread.”

**Mt 8:8,10,13** “The centurion said in reply, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed.’ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed and said to those following him, ‘Amen, I say to you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith.’ And Jesus said to the centurion, ‘You may go; as you have believed, let it be done for you.’ And at that very hour [his] servant was healed.”

**Mt 25:40** “And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’”

**Mt 26:26-28** “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and giving it to his disciples said, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed on behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins.’”

**Mk 14:22-24** “While they were eating, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, ‘Take it; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many.’”

**Lk 11:3** “Give us each day our daily bread.”

Lk 22:19-20 “Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.’ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you.’”

**Lk 24:1-35** “...and it happened that, while he was with them at table, he took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them. With that their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning [within us] while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?’ So they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem where they found gathered together the eleven and those with them who were saying, ‘The Lord has truly been raised and has appeared to Simon!’ Then the two recounted what had taken place on the way and how he was made known to them in the breaking of the bread.”

**Jn 1:29** “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”

**Jn 6:47-51** “Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world.”

**Acts 2: 42** “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.”

**Rom 12:1-2** “I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.”

**1 Cor 10:3-4** “All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink, for they drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was the Christ.”

**1 Cor 10:16-17** “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.”

**1 Cor 11:23-27** “For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was handed over, took bread, and, after he had given thanks, broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will have to answer for the body and blood of the Lord.”

**Heb 6:19-20** “This we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm, which reaches into the interior behind the veil, where Jesus has entered on our behalf as forerunner, becoming high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

**Heb 7:15-17** “It is even more obvious if another priest is raised up after the likeness of Melchizedek, who has become so, not by a law expressed in a commandment concerning physical descent but by the power of a life that cannot be destroyed. For it is testified: ‘You are a priest forever according to

the order of Melchizedek.’”

**Rv 3:20** “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, [then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me.”

**Rv 19:7** “Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory. For the wedding day of the Lamb has come, his bride has made herself ready.”

**The Rule of St. Benedict**

**RB Prol: 45-50** “Therefore we intend to establish a school for the Lord’s service... (for) the good of all concerned...(a) road that leads to salvation. But as we progress in this way of life and in faith, we shall run on the path of God’s commandments, our hearts overflowing with the inexpressible delight of love... (and) through patience share in the sufferings of Christ so that we may deserve also to share in his kingdom. Amen.”

**RB Prol: 1** “Listen carefully, my son, to the master’s instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart.”

**RB Prol: 8-11** Let us get up then, at long last, for the Scriptures rouse us when they say: It is high time for us to arise from sleep (Rom 13:11). Let us open our eyes to the light that comes from God, and our ears to the voice from heaven that every day calls out this charge: If you hear his voice today, do not harden your hearts (Ps 95:8). And again: You that have ears to hear, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches” (Rev 2:7).

**RB 4** The chapter “Tools for Good Works” outlines interior attitudes and exterior behaviors that foster faith, hope, and charity.

**RB 24** This chapter explains the degrees of excommunication with due consideration to the seriousness of a fault and the measure of discipline.

**RB 35:12-14** “An hour before mealtime, the kitchen workers of the week should each receive a drink and some bread over and above the regular portion, so that at mealtime, they may serve their brothers without grumbling or hardship. On solemn days, however, they should wait until after the dismissal.”

## Lesson 9: Work

### INTRODUCTION

Pax!

One of the biggest challenges that Christians face is to “carry Christ” into our work, whether that be official employment outside of our homes, domestic tasks inside of our homes, or volunteer work in charitable or community organizations. We may find that challenges, pressures, boredom, or temptations experienced while working may separate us from God.

This lesson shows how the Rule can help us to follow Christ before, after, and in the midst of work. We are often called to obey God through the instructions of our work supervisor. We can experience conversion of heart if we call on Christ in the midst of our work. Hardships experienced during our work can become blessings if we persevere with a stability of heart that comes from God alone.

Made in the image of God and called to be co-workers in His creation, we can celebrate the gift of labor and the accomplishments that come from it, benefits that may be found both outside of us and within us. In thanksgiving let us offer the “work of our hands” to God, and let us offer praise to God for our God-given talents and for the growth in holiness that can come through our work.

May you find Christ’s peace in your life with a right balance and a healthy rhythm of prayer and work, with the prayerful reading of Scripture and the Rule, with the study of lessons, with silent listening to God, and with your association with the Benedictine community of monks and affiliated Oblates.

*Lesson Nine will describe the necessary element of the human condition: work. Work will be presented as being composed of manual labor, other kinds of labor, and charitable acts.*

### 1. PRAYER

(This section provides the prayer that is prayed every night at the beginning of Vigils in our monastery along with Old and New Testament passages. There are more passages at the end of this document. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

*Come, O Holy Spirit, replenish the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your divine love.*

*Excite, O Lord, in your Church, the Spirit which our Most Holy Father, St. Benedict served; that filled with the same, we may study to love what he loved and practice what he taught. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*“A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit” (Ps 51:12).*

### **1.1 Old Testament Scripture**

“God blessed them and God said to them: ‘Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth.’ God also said: ‘See, I give you every seed-bearing plant on all the earth and every tree that has seed bearing fruit on it to be your food; and to all the wild animals, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the earth, I give all the green plants for food.’ And so it happened. God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed—the sixth day” (Gen 1:28-31). “The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it” (Gen 2:15).

### **1.2 New Testament Scripture**

“For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love you have demonstrated for his name by having served and continuing to serve the holy ones. We earnestly desire each of you to demonstrate the same eagerness for the fulfillment of hope until the end, so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who, through faith and patience, are inheriting the promises” (Heb 6:10-12).

### **1.3 The Rule of St. Benedict**

**RB Prol: 21-22** “Clothed then with faith and the performance of good works, let us set out on this way, with the Gospel for our guide, that we may deserve to see him who has called us to his kingdom (1 Thes 2:12). If we wish to dwell in the tent of the kingdom, we will never arrive unless we run there by doing good deeds”.

## **2. READINGS**

*“First of all, every time you begin a good work, you must pray to him most earnestly to bring it to perfection” (RB Prol: 4). “Therefore we intend to establish a school for the Lord’s service” (RB Prol: 45).*

### **2.1 The Benedictine Order and Work**

For almost thirteen centuries, the Benedictine Order worked to contribute to the survival of Western civilization in the founding of spiritual, cultural, and educational centers throughout Europe and was instrumental in preserving ancient culture. When

Father William Mark Duke, at the age of forty-eight, was called from New Brunswick in 1928 to become Coadjutor to the ailing Archbishop Timothy Casey of Vancouver, this archdiocese extended all the way to the Alberta border and comprised also the present dioceses of Nelson and Kamloops. This far-flung territory had a Catholic population of 87,000 as compared with the approximately 475,000 today in just the Vancouver Archdiocese alone. Although the vast region had a serious shortage of priests and was in grave financial difficulty, the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Cassulo, encouraged Archbishop Duke to establish at least a minor seminary. "Go on," he told the young archbishop, "and Providence will help you!" A note in Archbishop Duke's diary for July 2, 1931, read: "Day of decision. 'Go on and Providence will help you!'"

The Seminary of Christ the King was founded in 1931 by Archbishop William M. Duke of Vancouver. The Thomas and Annie McNeely home on a 129-acre estate at Ladner, a gift to the Archdiocese, was readied for the first seminarians. Renovations and construction began immediately to accommodate fifty students. Although classes could not yet begin at the seminary that September (1931), the dedication did take place on October 25, 1931, the Feast of Christ the King, before a gathering of 800 faithful and thirty-five priests. Father Donald Campbell, ordained ten years later, would be the first priest alumnus of this seminary.

Westminster Abbey was founded in Ladner, BC from Mount Angel, a Benedictine abbey in Oregon. In 1939 the five original founding members of the monastery came not only to begin a new centre of monastic life but also to take over the teaching and administration of the diocesan seminary, still located in Ladner. In 1939, with the approval of the Holy See, the Archbishop entrusted the Seminary to Benedictine monks as a training centre for both diocesan and religious priesthood students.

On October 30, 1944, a larger site with a farm was providentially located at Mission, B.C. The move was only accomplished a decade later, in 1954, one year after the election of Prior Eugene Medved as the first abbot. Westminster Abbey was established at its present site in 1954 after its temporary locations in Ladner and Burnaby. At the time the buildings were far from complete, which fact entailed great sacrifice. Various additions were made over the ensuing years and a wide program of landscaping took place. In 1951 the Seminary opened the Faculty of Theology.

Westminster Priory became independent in 1948 and in 1953 was raised to the status of an abbey. In 1966, through its own University Charter, the Seminary was empowered to grant the Bachelor of Arts degree as well as degrees in Theology. Finally, in 1979 it was decided to build the long-awaited abbey church, the centre of so much monastic and seminary life. Construction began as a project for the 1500th anniversary of the birth of St. Benedict (480-1980) and it was completed in 1982, when Cardinal Basil Hume (1923-1999) dedicated it.

The Holy Spirit shows no partiality in choosing men and women to follow Him. Since its inception, many men have been called to monastic life at Westminster Abbey from almost every walk of life. From its humble beginnings to the present day, the monks of Westminster Abbey live according to the practical wisdom of St. Benedict as found in his Rule. The abbot has authority to assign the monks to work in the monastery, college, parishes, chaplaincies, or foreign missions. Sometimes the work matches work that they had done before entering monastic life. However, in many cases he may see hidden talents and capabilities that invite further education and training so that the monks enter into completely different types of work for the benefit of the community, for their personal sanctification, and for the glory of God. In the monastic community, the abbot has authority over the work of the prior, cellarer, deans, kitchen servers, and others who have special responsibilities (refer to the RB resource page for detailed descriptions of these positions). These days, some of these positions no longer exist, but the principle remains the same; all monks in special positions have no authority except that given by God through the abbot. Over the course of their lives, monks may find themselves at work in many different positions based on the needs of the community.

## **2.2 Work as a Basic and Necessary Fact of Human Existence and a Way to Grow Closer to God**

Work is a basic and necessary fact of human existence. It takes up a great deal of our time and energy, helps us to earn a living, and provides a way to offer charitable goods and services to others from our surplus. We may find ourselves in a position of authority with the ability to offer work to others that will help to decrease unemployment and to offer greater opportunities in the area. Work can also be an expression of ourselves and lead to greater self-realization. If we offer our time, energy, and talents and approach our work in communion with God, in time we will find that our work provides much opportunity for growth in virtue.

## **2.3 The Danger of Falling Into an Attitude of Disobedience and Laziness That Leads to Sloth (RB Prol: 2)**

People living outside of the monastic enclosure must contend with a fast-paced and often unstable culture that does not always give consideration to age, talent, just wage, or individual and family needs. A person may need to move from one location to another to find suitable work, may need to change positions or jobs within his workplace to find greater stability, or may find that his “now valued” work will in time seem to have “no value” when met with advancements in technology or changes in the economy. The worker may begin to feel as if he is a cog in a machine, and a sense of inadequacy along with a loss of connection with his God-given gifts may result. When such challenges arise, the danger exists that we may be tempted to fall into an attitude

of disobedience and laziness that leads to sloth (RB Prol: 2). St. Paul counters this frame of mind: “In toil and drudgery, night and day we worked, so as not to burden any of you. Rather, we wanted to present ourselves as a model for you, so that you might imitate us. In fact, when we were with you, we instructed you that if anyone was unwilling to work, neither should that one eat” (2 Thes 3:8-10). Our work is not meant to be just for ourselves but for the benefit of others and for the glory of God.

#### **2.4 The Possibility for Frustrations, Tensions, and Temptations at Work to Become Blessings**

“First of all, every time you begin a good work, you must pray to him most earnestly to bring it to perfection” (RB Prol: 4). “We believe that the divine presence is everywhere” (RB 19:1). Rather than becoming impatient when confronted with challenges or when faced with tedious monotony in our work, we should pray for the strength to set aside our desire for self-gratification and honor, and instead humbly pray that Christ be found in any given moment. Interruptions, distractions, personal weaknesses, differing temperaments among workers, reluctance to accept responsibilities for mistakes, and experience of failure in accomplishing assigned work may be present. Pride, envy, and desire for honor may take hold of the worker to spoil the work. However, all of these tensions and temptations can become blessings if they lead us to call upon Christ so that we become more obedient to God’s will and more compassionate to others.

Sometimes our workplaces us in situations that go beyond our natural abilities. At those times, we need to call upon God to help us humbly face our inability to resolve a particular circumstance and to guide us in seeking help without feeling the need to express irritation, to try to escape, or to avoid the issue (RB 68). With God’s grace and prudent perseverance, we may find that a “bad” work situation leads us to realize previously hidden personal gifts and talents. It is good to remind ourselves that we are not the cause of our gifts and talents and that every type of legitimate work, chosen or not chosen, can become holy if through that work, we allow ourselves to become closer to God. We should accept our talents as gifts from our loving Father without denying or questioning their worth. Refusal to acknowledge our talents and gifts contradicts our human dignity and essentially doubts God. If we remember that our gifts and talents are meant to be used for the benefit of others and for the glory of God, any type of work assumes immense value and significance in His sight.

#### **2.5 How Can We Bring Christ into Our Work?**

Some labor does not require much mental alertness; in this type of work, we may find that we are able to pray not only before and after our work but are free to pray in the midst of our work as well. Sometimes it is not easy to incorporate prayer into work. Some tasks require much intellectual acuity; in this type of work, we may find it best to pray before beginning the work, to pray after ending the work, and then to offer the

whole work to God. If we find ourselves separating our work from our prayer, we should take time to consider our attitude and the way in which we approach our work. We may ask ourselves: What is the work that I do? Why do I do this work? For whom do I work? Who benefits from my work? Do I allow myself to focus only on personal gain? Do I discipline myself to focus on one task at a time and place future success in God's hands? Do I sacrifice necessary "holy leisure" so that I may continue to do my work instead? These questions provide opportunities for us to experience *conversatio morum* (conversion of heart) so that we may be conformed more to Christ. To see our work as God's gift for us to participate in the unfolding of creation and in the Divine Plan requires humility and the commitment of our time and energy along with perseverance and repeated practice.

## **2.6 Where is Work Mentioned in Scripture?**

God is shown to be effortlessly and tirelessly "at work" in the first verse of the first chapter of the Old Testament: "In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth..." (Gen 1:1). After God created man and woman, "God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth" (Gen 1:28-29). "The LORD God then took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it" (Gen 2:15). He called Adam and Eve to be co-workers with Him in the development of His creation. They were given dominion over the earth and were to subdue it, not according to their plan, but according to God's plan. ("Dominion" comes from the Latin word for Lord, "Dominus"; hence Adam and Eve were to care for creation with God's own gentle, loving concern.) Work existed as a necessary good before original sin and is not a consequence of it. After Adam and Eve sinned against God, suffering entered into the world and into their work; the human condition was thrown into disarray. Yet God still called them to follow His example and to look upon creation with joy and to work with Him to bring forth His blessings.

"God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good" (Gen 1:31). "On the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing; he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy" (Gen 2:2-3). Although work is necessary and good, it is not meant to absorb all of our attention during all of the hours of our day. Many of us have family responsibilities which require our time and attention as well. Sometimes even optional work commitments compete with our rest and prayer. In Benedictine spirituality, a balanced order of labor, *Opus Dei*, and *lectio divina* creates a healthy rhythm that allows God to sanctify us and the work that we do throughout all hours of our day. There is need for us to rest, to take time to look prayerfully at our work, and to give thanks to God. If we follow the wisdom of St. Benedict, work takes on a relative value rather than being an end in itself or the driving power of our lives.

In the New Testament, St. Joseph worked as a carpenter (cf Mt 13:55) and most likely taught Jesus that same craft. St. Paul stayed and worked with tentmakers since he was of the same trade (cf Acts 18:3). The greatest work of all was found in Jesus' teaching, healing, carrying of the Cross, Crucifixion, Death, and Resurrection. Jesus said, "My Father is at work until now, so I am at work" (Jn 5:17). When joined with Christ's sufferings, whatever sufferings we experience in our work become a path of salvation for us. Jesus Christ is the source of all grace in whatever work we do!

### **2.7 How Is Charity Linked with Work?**

Labor in the world is one of God's great gifts. When we choose to live a less extravagant, more simplified lifestyle, we become free to give to others from our surplus time and goods; we answer God's call to be the salt and the light of the world. Our work and our surplus should be linked with our charity to others. When we use our gifts and talents to let Christ's light shine through us, others see the good works we do and give glory to God (cf Mt 5:13-16). We cannot serve God with full hearts while still caught up in the greedy pursuit of worldly gain (cf Mt 6:24). Let us look to the Beatitudes (cf Mt 5:3-12) which constitute a spiritual and moral code upon which to base our work. The parable of the talents (cf Mt 25:14-30) encourages us to not be afraid to use all of the gifts that God gives us to bring about a harvest for Him in this world. "For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them" (Rom 12:4-6).

### **2.8 Where Do We See Other Expressions of Our Work or a Summons to do Work?**

Our work may not produce concrete things, but the effects of our work have lasting value. As coworkers with God, our work prolongs the development of creation when we use our talents to benefit others in the world. The trees that would have died and rotted became the wooden pews and the carved crucifix in the basilica through the work of the monks' hands over 100 years ago. The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the Offertory prayer: "Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the bread we offer you: fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life. Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation, for through your goodness we have received the wine we offer you: fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become our spiritual drink" (The Roman Missal, 2011). Work is meant to be man's opportunity to cooperate in God's unceasing acts of creation; by and through our labor we are able to offer worship and to praise God. Our work can be a means of sanctification for us and for the world when we are united with Christ. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we implore our Father, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10). We are called to work in bringing

His kingdom to this time and to this place. Our work is meant to be a means for us to grow in our love of God, to become more compassionate and merciful toward others, to celebrate our accomplishments by offering them back to God with gratitude, and to be conformed to Christ more each day so that one day we will be united with Him in eternity.

“The primary basis of the value of work is man himself.” “In the first place, work is ‘for man’ and not man ‘for work’.” “Different sorts of work that people do can have greater or lesser objective value” and “are judged above all by the measure of the dignity of the subject of work, that is to say, the person, the individual who carries it out.” “The basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done, but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person.” “It is always man who is the purpose of the work” and his “actions must all serve to realize his humanity.” “All work, whether manual or intellectual, is inevitably linked with toil” and “constitutes an announcement of death.” “By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; For you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen 3:19). “The final word of the Gospel” (related to work) “is found in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ.” “The Paschal Mystery contains the Cross of Christ and his obedience unto death.” “It also contains the elevation of Christ, who by means of death on a cross returns to his disciples in the Resurrection with the power of the Holy Spirit.” “The Christian finds in human work a small part of the cross of Christ and accepts it in the same spirit of redemption in which Christ accepted his cross for us.” “The indispensability of the cross which this toil constitutes reveals a new good springing from work itself.” “He shows himself a true disciple of Christ by carrying the cross in his turn every day in the activity that he is called upon to perform.” “By enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified for us, man in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity.” Our work can “contribute to the better ordering of human society,” (and) “it is of vital concern to the kingdom of God.” “Let the Christian who listens to the word of the living God, uniting work with prayer, know the place that his work has not only in earthly progress, but also in the development of the kingdom of God, to which we are all called through the power of the Holy Spirit and through the word of the Gospel.” “What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?” (Luke 9:25). (Excerpts from Pope St. John Paul II’s encyclical on work, *Laborem Exercens* [#6, #27]).

Pope St. John Paul II wrote that work is to be in harmony with God and with humanity, and that its value lies in the beneficial effect that the work has on the worker. This means that the way we do our work has more value than what is produced from our work. St. Benedict reflects this same ideal in the Rule specifying that the tools of the workshop should be handled as the sacred vessels of the altar (RB 31:10), that what is produced in the monastery should be sold at a lower cost (RB 57), and that monks should not become distressed if conditions call for hard work and require the labor of

our hands (RB 48). “Therefore, my beloved brothers, be firm, steadfast, always fully devoted to the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Cor 15:58). If we truly place God first in our lives, humility and obedience naturally follow. Our work and our lives become holier because we have turned to Christ as the source of our strength and salvation.

A recent Gallup Poll revealed that only 31% of workers in the United States said that they were personally invested in their jobs and enjoying them. We find joy in knowing that, with the practice of humility and with God’s grace, we become co-workers with God in the work of creation; through our human efforts we can sanctify the world in Christ and lead others to eternal life. Each of us was made in God’s image to share in His creative being and to continue His work in the world. Our bodies, talents, and gifts are to be directed according to His will as we labor to “subdue” the earth to bring forth good fruit. It is good for us to remember that “neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are equal, and each will receive wages in proportion to his labor, for we are God’s co-workers; you are God’s field, God’s building” (1 Cor 3:7-9). “For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them” (Eph 2:10). Stability and humility rooted in Christ’s sacrificial love are the keys to happiness no matter what difficulties or challenges we face in our daily work. May we follow the wisdom of St. Benedict to praise God in our daily work as part of the journey of hastening toward our heavenly home (RB 73:8).

### **3. SUMMARY**

#### **3.1 The Benedictine Order and Work**

- A. The Benedictine Order contributed to the survival of Western civilization.
  - 1. They founded spiritual, cultural, and educational centers throughout Europe.
  - 2. They were instrumental in preserving ancient culture.
- B. In 1931 the Seminary of Christ the King was founded by Archbishop William M. Duke of Vancouver.
  - 1. The Thomas and Annie McNeely home on a 129-acre estate at Ladner, a gift to the Archdiocese, was readied for the first seminarians.
  - 2. Renovations and construction began immediately to accommodate fifty students.
  - 3. October 25, 1931 the dedication took place on the Feast of Christ the King.

- C. In 1939 the five original founding members of the monastery arrived from Mount Saint Angel.
  - 1. They came not only to begin a new centre of monastic life but also to take over the teaching and administration of the diocesan seminary, still located in Ladner.
  - 2. 1939: The Archbishop entrusted the Seminary to Benedictine monks as a training centre for both diocesan and religious priesthood students.
- D. October 30, 1944, a larger site with a farm was providentially located at Mission, B.C.
  - 1. 1954: Westminster Abbey was established at its present site
  - 2. Various additions were made over the ensuing years and a wide program of landscaping took place.
  - 3. 1951: The Seminary opened the Faculty of Theology.
- E. 1948: Westminster Priory became independent and in 1953 was raised to the status of an abbey.
  - 1. 1966: through its own University Charter, the Seminary was empowered to grant the Bachelor of Arts degree as well as degrees in Theology.
  - 2. 1979: Construction began as a project for the 1500th anniversary of the birth of St. Benedict (480-1980)
  - 3. 1982: Construction completed
- F. Following the Rule, the abbot has authority over the many monks who have been called by the Holy Spirit from almost every walk of life to become monks at Westminster Abbey.
  - 1. The abbot assigns the monks to work in the monastery, college, parishes, chaplaincies, or foreign missions.
  - 2. This work may parallel or complement the work that the monk had done before entering monastic life.
  - 3. The abbot may see hidden talents and capabilities that invite further education and training for the monks to enter into completely different types of work to benefit the community, to sanctify the monk, and to bring glory to God.
  - 4. The abbot has authority over those with positions of responsibility in the monastery.

5. Over the course of their lives, the monks may find themselves at work in various apostolates according to the needs of the community.

### 3.2 Work as a Basic and Necessary Fact of Human Existence and a Way to Grow Closer to God

- A. Work takes up a great deal of our time and energy, helps us to earn a living, and provides a way to practice charity to others by offering goods and services to others from our surplus.
- B. If we approach our work in communion with God, we can grow in virtue.
- C. Work can also be an expression of ourselves that leads to greater self-realization.
- D. Work can be a means of sanctification for us and for the world when it is united with Christ.
- E. Our work is meant to be a means for us to grow in our love of God, to become more compassionate and merciful toward others, to celebrate our accomplishments by offering them back to God with gratitude, and to be conformed to Christ more each day so that one day we will be united with Him in eternity.
- F. Pope St. John Paul II wrote that work is to be in harmony with God and with humanity and that its value lies in the beneficial effect that the work has on the worker.
- G. The way we do our work has more value than what is produced from our work. (See excerpts from Pope St. John Paul II's encyclical *Laborem Exercens* following this outline.)
- H. In obedience and humility and with God's grace, we become co-workers with God in the work of creation through our human efforts to sanctify the world in Christ and to lead others to eternal life.
- I. Each of us was made in God's image to share in His creative being and to continue His work in the world.
- J. Our bodies, talents, and gifts are to be directed according to His will as we labor to subdue the earth to bring forth good fruit.
- K. "Neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who causes the growth. The one who plants and the one who waters are equal, and each will receive wages in proportion to his labor, for we are God's co-workers; you are God's field, God's building" (1 Cor 3:7-9).

### 3.3 The Danger of Falling Into an Attitude of Disobedience and Laziness That Leads to Sloth (RB Prol: 2)

- A. A recent Gallup Poll revealed that only 31% of workers in the United States reported that they were personally invested in their jobs and enjoying them.
- B. In our culture employers do not always give consideration to age, talent, just wage, or individual and family needs.
- C. A person may need to move from one location to another to find suitable work.
- D. A person may need to change positions or jobs frequently within his or her workplace to find greater stability.
- E. A person may find that his “now valued” work will in time seem to have “no value” with advancements in technology or changes in the economy.
- F. A sense of inadequacy along with a failure to use God-given gifts may result.
- G. Interruptions, distractions, personal weaknesses, differing temperaments among workers, reluctance to accept responsibilities for mistakes, and experience of failure in accomplishing assigned work may hamper our ability to see the dignity of our work.
- H. Motives of pride, envy, and desire for honor may threaten the worker’s ability to cooperate with God.
- I. Work may place us in situations that go beyond our natural abilities (RB 68).
- J. We cannot serve God wholeheartedly while we are caught up in the greedy pursuit of worldly gain (cf Mt 6:24).

### 3.4 The Possibility for Frustrations, Tensions, and Temptations at Work to Become Blessings

- A. Ask Christ to help us become more obedient to God’s will and more compassionate to others.
- B. Call upon God to help us humbly face our inability to resolve a particular problem.
- C. Ask for the grace to avoid feeling the need to express irritation, to try to escape, or to avoid the issue.
- D. With God’s grace and prudent perseverance, we may find that acceptance of undesirable work can lead us to realize hidden personal gifts and talents.
- E. We need to remind ourselves that we are not the cause of our gifts and talents and that every type of work, chosen or not chosen, can become holy if through that work, we allow ourselves to become closer to God.
- F. We are called to accept our talents as gifts from our loving Father without denying or questioning their worth.

- G. Never doubt our human dignity or the significance of our work in the sight of God.
- H. Our gifts and talents are meant to be used for the benefit of others and for the glory of God.

### 3.5 How Can We Bring Christ into Our Work?

- A. For work not requiring much intellectual effort, we can pray not only before and after our work but also in the midst of our work.
- B. For work requiring intellectual acuity, we can pray before beginning the work, pray after ending the work, and offer the whole work to God.
- C. It may be good for us to reflect on what may be separating us from Christ in our work:
  1. What is the work that I do? Why do I do this work? For whom do I work?
  2. Who benefits from my work? Do I allow myself to focus only on personal gain?
  3. Do I discipline myself to focus on one task at a time and to place future success in God's hands?
  4. Do I sacrifice necessary "holy leisure" so that I may pursue my work relentlessly?
- D. Reflections on life should open us to conversatio morum (conversion of heart) so that we may be conformed more into Christ's likeness as we begin to see our work as God's gift for us to enable us to participate in the unfolding of creation and in the divine plan.
- E. Readiness for change of heart during our work requires humility and the offering of our time and energy to the Lord along with perseverance and repeated practice.
- F. We need to unite whatever sufferings we experience at work with Christ's sufferings.
- G. A balanced order of labor, Opus Dei, and lectio divina can help to create a healthy rhythm that welcomes God to sanctify us and the work that we do.

### 3.6 Where is Work Mentioned in Scripture?

- A. "God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good" (Gen 1:31).
- B. "On the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing; he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy" (Gen 2:2-3).

- C. St. Joseph worked as a carpenter (cf Mt 13:55).
- D. St. Paul worked with tentmakers since he was of the same trade (cf Acts 18:3).
- E. The greatest work of all was found in Jesus' teaching, healing, carrying of the Cross, Crucifixion, Death, and Resurrection.
- F. The parable of the talents (cf Mt 25:14-30) encourages us to be enterprising in using all of the gifts that God gives us to bring about a harvest for Him in this world.
- G. "For as in one body we have many parts, and all the parts do not have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them" (Rom 12:4-6).
- H. "For we are his handiwork, created in Christ Jesus for the good works that God has prepared in advance, that we should live in them" (Eph 2:10).

### 3.7 How Is Charity Linked with Work?

- A. If we choose to live a less extravagant, more simplified lifestyle, we become free to give to others from our surplus time and goods.
- B. Our work is a way to answer God's call to be the salt and the light of the world.
- C. When we use our gifts and talents to let Christ's light shine in us, others see the good works we do and give glory to God (cf Mt 5:13-16).
- D. The Beatitudes (cf Mt 5:3-12) provide a spiritual and moral code upon which to base our work.
- E. If we are in a position of authority, we may be able to offer work to others that will help to decrease unemployment and to offer greater opportunities for economic development.
- F. Work is not meant to be just for ourselves but for the benefit of others and for the glory of God.

### 3.8 Where Do We See Other Expressions of Our Work or a Summons to do Work?

- A. Our work prolongs creation. The trees that would have died and rotted became the wooden pews and the carved crucifix in the Archabbey Basilica through the work of the monks' hands over 100 years ago.
- B. The Liturgy of the Eucharist begins with the offertory prayer that includes thanksgiving for the bread as the "fruit of the earth and work of human hands" and the wine as the "fruit of the vine and work of human hands" (The Roman Missal, 2011).

- C. When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we implore our Father, "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10). We are called through our work to bring about His kingdom in this time and in this place.
- D. May we follow the wisdom of St. Benedict to offer worship and to praise God in our daily work as part of the journey of hastening toward our heavenly home (RB 73:8). "The primary basis of the value of work is man himself." "In the first place, work is 'for man' and not man 'for work'." "Different sorts of work that people do can have greater or lesser objective value" and "are judged above all by the measure of the dignity of the subject of work, that is to say, the person, the individual who carries it out." "The basis for determining the value of human work is not primarily the kind of work being done, but the fact that the one who is doing it is a person." "It is always man who is the purpose of the work" and his "actions must all serve to realize his humanity." "All work, whether manual or intellectual, is inevitably linked with toil" and "constitutes an announcement of death." "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; For you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). "The final word of the Gospel" (related to work) "is found in the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ." "The Paschal Mystery contains the Cross of Christ and his obedience unto death." "It also contains the elevation of Christ, who by means of death on a cross returns to his disciples in the Resurrection with the power of the Holy Spirit." "The Christian finds in human work a small part of the cross of Christ and accepts it in the same spirit of redemption in which Christ accepted his cross for us." "The indispensability of the cross which this toil constitutes reveals a new good springing from work itself." "He shows himself a true disciple of Christ by carrying the cross in his turn every day in the activity that he is called upon to perform." "By enduring the toil of work in union with Christ crucified for us, man in a way collaborates with the Son of God for the redemption of humanity." Our work can "contribute to the better ordering of human society," (and) "it is of vital concern to the kingdom of God." "Let the Christian who listens to the word of the living God, uniting work with prayer, know the place that his work has not only in earthly progress, but also in the development of the kingdom of God, to which we are all called through the power of the Holy Spirit and through the word of the Gospel." "What profit is there for one to gain the whole world yet lose or forfeit himself?" (Luke 9:25). (Excerpts from Pope St. John Paul II's encyclical on work, *Laborem Exercens* [#6, #27]).

#### **4. SUPPLEMENTARY READING**

##### **4.1 Prayer and Work – A Balanced Life**

In a society which often becomes ensnared in relentless work or pleasure-filled indulgence, the Oblate seeks to live a life totally dedicated to God and, therefore, balanced among prayer, work, creative leisure, and reading that nourishes the spirit. The experience of the ages shows that such balance best keeps a person from being caught up in anything other than God Himself.

Prayer is an expression of the Oblate's faith-response to God and is directed to facilitate habitual union with God. It is not simply a matter of praying from time to time but of directing one's whole life to union with God. Sensitivity to God's presence leads the Oblate to gaze with wonder and gratitude upon the gracious deeds that God has wrought, not only in history but in one's personal life yesterday and today. The Benedictine attitude of prayer is also one of expectant waiting for the mysterious coming of God from moment to moment, so that the Oblate seeks to greet the Lord as He comes in His own sovereign, and often surprising, way in each circumstance.

The Oblate undertakes his or her work not so much as a means of gaining material wealth but rather as an opportunity to share in God's own creative love and in Christ's ongoing redemption of all creation. The Oblate takes up daily work as a task full of hope and promise and as a service to others in family, community, Church, and world. Since for the Christian work is linked with charity to the poor and discipleship of Christ, Oblates must refuse to be dominated by things so that they may be free to serve God and neighbor and have something to give to the poor (RB 31:9, 55:9).

The Oblate also allows for sufficient time with family and time for community activities, according to the way God calls through one's particular circumstances.

The Oblate need not feel guilty for setting aside time for holy reading and holy leisure (See H.1 & 4 below), which can nourish the spirit and ward off the frenzy that comes from workaholism.

## **4.2 Community**

The context of the Rule, with the possible exception of the Prologue and RB 4-7, is that of Christian community. Oblates necessarily live in a spirit of community, of oneness with others with whom they share Christ's love, even if necessity keeps them living alone or without tangible Christian support. Oblates realize that we cannot live Christian lives as mere individuals; we seek everlasting life together, and only as a community do we form the Body of Christ. Oblates nurture family values and, if possible, take an active part in those efforts of their parishes and civic communities which best utilize their gifts. Oblates love the monastic community to which they are affiliated and strive to keep in touch with it through prayer and through a local moderator and/or correspondence with the Director of Oblates or other monks.

### 4.3 A Sketch of History of the Oblate Movement

The following sketch of the history of the Oblate movement is taken from the 1937 edition of a Manual for Oblates of St. Benedict, by Abbot Alcuin Deutsch, O.S.B. (St. John's Abbey Press, Collegeville, MN), with some additions from the Manual of the Secular Oblates of St. Benedict issued by St. Vincent Archabbey in 1898.

The earliest use of the term "oblate" with regard to Benedictine monasteries refers to boys who were offered by their parents to be educated for the monastic life. This custom is described in RB 59 and mentioned by St. Gregory the Great in his story of St. Benedict's life. St. Gregory also seems to imply that some adults living outside the monastery put themselves under St. Benedict's direction and visited his monastery occasionally for spiritual guidance. However, we cannot tell whether such people were "Oblates" in the present sense of the term, and there is no known use of the term "oblate" for adult affiliates until the 11th century. Still, as early as the ninth century the term "confratres" was used in monastic literature to refer to faithful lay people who participated in the life of the monastery through prayer and almsgiving.

In the 11th century St. William, Abbot of Hirschau, gave a more precise status to Oblates by referring to them in two categories: "Interns," or "Regular Oblates," who lived in a monastery under its discipline but without vows, and "Externs," or "Secular Oblates," who lived on the outside but were affiliated by promises of obedience and turned over a part or whole of their possessions to the monastery, sometimes by way of legacy. During this age when Benedictine monasticism reached a peak of influence in Europe, many lay people chose to consecrate themselves in the latter way. Since St. Henry II (972-1024), Duke of Bavaria and a Holy Roman Emperor, vigorously promoted Benedictine life, he is considered a special patron of the Oblates. During the 14th century the Congregation of the Olivetans, founded by St. Bernard Tolomei, generated new interest in the Oblate movement by establishing a Brotherhood of Oblates. Frances of Rome (1384-1440) gathered together a number of noble Roman women to place themselves under the spiritual direction of the Olivetan Benedictines, to renounce their lives of extravagance, and to give service to the poor. These women then began to live in community and to engage in daily common prayer in addition to their work with the poor. This group became known as the "Institute of Oblates" and exists in Rome even today. Therefore, St. Frances of Rome is considered a patroness of the Oblates.

With the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, Benedictine monasteries were practically wiped out, and so the Oblate movement also declined; but when monasteries began to be reestablished, interest in the Oblates was likewise revived. In 1884 a General Assembly of the Cassinese Congregation of Benedictines approved of the reception of Oblates for the entire congregation. Oblates first gained an official canonical status as the "Institute of the Secular Oblates of St. Benedict" in 1888, when

the Holy See favored Oblates with numerous indulgences and later confirmed a "Ceremonial for Oblates" through the Congregation of Sacred Rites. In 1889 Pope Leo XIII approved a set of statutes for Oblates for a period of 10 years, and in 1898 he issued a brief granting many spiritual favors and privileges to Oblates. In 1904 the Holy See gave official approval of a set of "Statutes and Rules" for Oblates, and in 1927 a new edition of these, including a few alterations and additions, was approved by the Sacred Congregation of Religious. It is important to note that the "Statutes and Rules" were mainly spiritual guidelines, not binding under pain of sin, and that the administration of Oblate programs has been left ultimately in the hands of the monastic communities to which Oblates have been affiliated.

## 5. SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

### Books

Sister M. Dolores Dowling, O.S.B., "Instructions for Benedictine Oblates," Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Tucson, AZ.

Daniel Rees and Other Members of the English Benedictine Congregation, *Consider Your Call: A Theology of Monastic Life Today* (Cistercian Studies Series), 1978.

Tolbert McCarroll, "Humanizing Humility: RB 7: A Psychology of Spiritual Growth," *Benedictines*, Fall- Winter 1980/81.

Fr. Cyprian Smith, O.S.B., *The Path of Life*, (especially Chapter 12), Ampleforth Abbey Press.

Fr. Donald S. Raila, O.S.B., *Lessons from Saint Benedict: Finding Joy in Daily Life*, (especially Chapter 20), Sacred Winds Press, 2011 [also, *A Study Guide to...* (2013)].

Fr. Michael Casey, O.C.S.O., *Seventy-Four Tools for Good Living: Reflections on the Fourth Chapter of Benedict's Rule*, Liturgical Press.

Fr. Julian Peters, O.S.B., "Experiencing Labor as Holy," *Benedictine Spirituality for Oblates*, St. Meinrad Archabbey.

Pope St. John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens, Encyclical on Human Work* promulgated September 14, 1981.

*Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC, #2427, #2428), United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1994. (Also available online from United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [www.ccc.usccb.org](http://www.ccc.usccb.org)).

The History of Westminster Abbey: <https://westminsterabbey.ca/benedictine-monasticism/our-history/>

## **YouTube**

[How Do You Balance Work And Prayer: Father Boniface](#)

[Fr. Eric Hollas, Prior of St. John's Abbey in Collegeville, Minnesota](#)

In his Talk 2: Prayer & Life, Fr Michael Casey speaks about [Efficiency and Multitasking](#) at minute 28

## **6. REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

This [link](#) provides an opportunity to share your responses to a few questions after you have read, reflected on and prayed over a lesson's topic. (It is not required to provide answers to the questions but Oblate Novices are encouraged to do so.)

### **Oblates & Genuine Conversion**

This section contains two factual questions; all answers are found in that lesson or pertain to it.

- 1. What is the purpose of work according to God's divine plan? How is our work meant to change us and the world?**
- 2. Does the abbot always assign work based on the work experience that a monk had before entering the monastery? Why would he not do so?**

### **Personal Conversion of Life**

This section contains your choice of one reflection question. Please reply to one of the following three questions (though you are welcome to reply to more than one, if you wish):

- 3. Have you realized hidden God-given gifts and talents that appeared in the course of your work? Can you name your gifts and talents?**
- 4. Have you ever been challenged to accept a task for which you did not feel qualified? Do you now see more ways to respond to that situation?**
- 5. What can you do to become more aware of God's presence in your work?**

## **APPENDIX 9 – Additional Optional References for Lesson 9**

### **Full Texts of Scripture and Rule Verses**

(This section provides more passages from the Old and New Testament and the Holy Rule. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

### **Old Testament Scripture**

**Ps 23: 5-6** ‘You set a table before me in front of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Indeed, goodness and mercy will pursue me all the days of my life; I will dwell in the house of the LORD for endless days.’

**Gn 18:2-8** “Looking up, he [Abraham] saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them; and bowing to the ground, he said: ‘Sir, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet, and then rest under the tree. Now that you have come to your servant, let me bring you a little food that you may refresh yourselves; and afterward you may go on your way.’ ‘Very well,’ they replied, ‘do as you have said.’ Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, ‘Quick, three measures of bran flour! Knead it and make bread.’ He ran to the herd, picked out a tender, choice calf, and gave it to a servant, who quickly prepared it. Then he got some curds and milk, as well as the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them, waiting on them under the tree while they ate.”

**Gn 19:1-3** “The two angels reached Sodom in the evening, as Lot was sitting at the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he got up to greet them; and bowing down with his face to the ground, he said, ‘Please, my lords, come aside into your servant’s house for the night, and bathe your feet; you can get up early to continue your journey.’ But they replied, ‘No, we will pass the night in the town square.’ He urged them so strongly, however, that they turned aside to his place and entered his house. He prepared a banquet for them, baking unleavened bread, and they dined.”

**Ex 12:49** “There will be one law for the native and for the alien residing among you.”

**Lv 19:9-10** “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not be so thorough that you reap the field to its very edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Likewise, you shall not pick your vineyard bare, nor gather up the grapes that have fallen. These things you shall leave for the poor and the alien. I, the LORD, am your God.”

**Lv 19:33-34** “When an alien resides with you in your land, do not mistreat such a one. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the LORD, am your God.”

**Dt 8:3-4** “He therefore let you be afflicted with hunger, and then fed you with manna, a food unknown to you and your ancestors, so you might know that it is not by bread alone that people live, but by all that comes forth from the mouth of the LORD. The clothing did not fall from you in tatters, nor did your feet swell these forty years.”

**Dt 15:7-8, 10** “If one of your kindred is in need in any community in the land which the LORD, your God, is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor close your hand against your kin who is in need. Instead, you shall freely open your hand and generously lend what suffices to meet that need. When you give, give generously and not with a stingy heart; for that, the LORD, your God, will bless you in all your works and undertakings.”

**Dt 26:12** “When you have finished setting aside all the tithes of your produce in the third year, the year of the tithes, and have given them to the Levite, the resident alien, the orphan and the widow, that they may eat and be satisfied in your own communities...”

**1 Sm 25:6** “Say to him, ‘Peace be with you, my brother, and with your family, and with all who belong to you.’”

**1 Kgs 17:10-16** “He arose and went to Zarephath. When he arrived at the entrance of the city, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called out to her, ‘Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink.’ She left to get it, and he called out after her, ‘Please bring along a crust of bread.’ She said, ‘As the LORD, your God, lives, I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar and a little oil in my jug. Just now I was collecting a few sticks, to go in and prepare something for myself and my son; when we have eaten it, we shall die.’ Elijah said to her, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake and bring it to me. Afterwards you can prepare something for yourself and your son. For the LORD, the God of Israel, says: The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the LORD sends rain upon the earth.’ She left and did as Elijah had said. She had enough to eat for a long time—he and she and her household. The jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD spoken through Elijah.”

**Tb 4:7** “Give alms from your possessions. Do not turn your face away from any of the poor, so that God’s face will not be turned away from you.”

**Ps 68:6-7** “Father of the fatherless, defender of widows—God in his holy abode, God gives a home to the forsaken, who leads prisoners out to prosperity, while rebels live in the desert.”

**Ps 146:6-9** “The maker of heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them, Who keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed, who gives bread to the hungry. The

LORD sets prisoners free; the LORD gives sight to the blind. The LORD raises up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD protects the resident alien, comes to the aid of the orphan and the widow, but thwarts the way of the wicked.”

**Prv 19:17** “Whoever cares for the poor lends to the LORD, who will pay back the sum in full.”

**Wis 19:13** “And the punishments came upon the sinners not without forewarnings from the violence of the thunderbolts. For they justly suffered for their own misdeeds, since they treated their guests with the more grievous hatred.”

**Is 58:6-7; 10-11** “Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking off every yoke? Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your house; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own flesh? If you lavish your food on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; then your light shall rise in the darkness, and your gloom shall become like midday; then the LORD will guide you always and satisfy your thirst in parched places, will give strength to your bones and you shall be like a watered garden, like a flowing spring whose waters never fail.”

**Is 61:1-3** “The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; He has sent me to bring good news to the afflicted, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God; to comfort all who mourn; to place on those who mourn in Zion a diadem instead of ashes, to give them oil of gladness instead of mourning, a glorious mantle instead of a faint spirit.”

**Jer 22:3** “Thus says the LORD: Do what is right and just. Rescue the victims from the hand of their oppressors. Do not wrong or oppress the resident alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.”

**Zec 7:10** “Do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the resident alien or the poor; do not plot evil against one another in your hearts.”

### **New Testament Scripture**

**Mt 22:37-39** “He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

**Mt 25:40** “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”

**Mt. 25:45** “Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.”

**Mt 5:41-42** “Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.”

**Mt 5:46-48** “For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

**Mt 8:11** “I say to you, many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven.”

**Mt 10:7-8,12** “As you go, make this proclamation: ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. As you enter a house, wish it peace.”

**Mt 20: 26-28** “Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**Mt 25:34-40** “Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me. Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’”

**Lk 5:27-29** “After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the customs post. He said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him. Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were at table with them.”

**Lk 6:30** “Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back.”

**Lk 14:13-14** “Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you.”

**Lk 15:1-2** “The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to him, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’”

**Lk 19:2-7** “Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.’ And he came down quickly and received him with joy. When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, ‘He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner.’”

**Lk 22:27-30** “For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who serves. It is you who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father has conferred one on me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

**Acts 2:44-47** “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one’s need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people.”

**Rom 12:12-13** “Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality.”

**Rom 15:1** “We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.”

**Heb 13:1-3** “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels. Be mindful of prisoners as if sharing their imprisonment, and of the ill-treated as of yourselves, for you also are in the body.”

**Jas 2: 1-5** “My brothers, show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. For if a man with gold rings on his fingers and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and a poor person in shabby clothes also comes in, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say, ‘Sit here, please,’ while you say to the poor one, ‘Stand there,’ or ‘Sit at my feet,’ have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil designs? Listen, my beloved brothers. Did not God choose those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?”

**Jas 2:14-17** “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,’ but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

**1 Pt 4:9-10** “Be hospitable to one another without complaining. As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”

**3 John 1:5** “Beloved, you are faithful in all you do for the brothers, especially for strangers; they have testified to your love before the church. Please help them in a way worthy of God to continue their journey.”

### **The Rule of St. Benedict**

**RB 4: 20-22, 25-26** “Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way; the love of Christ must come before all else. Never give a hollow greeting of peace or turn away when someone needs your love.”

**RB 4:10-19** “Renounce yourself in order to follow Christ (Mt 16:24; Lk 9:23); discipline your body (1 Cor 9:27); do not pamper yourself, but love fasting. You must relieve the lot of the poor, clothe the naked, visit the sick (Mt 25:36), and bury the dead. Go to help the troubled and console the sorrowing.”

**RB 4:20-22,25-26** “Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way; the love of Christ must come before all else. Never give a hollow greeting of peace or turn away when someone needs your love.”

**RB 22:8** “On arising for the Work of God, they will quietly encourage each other, for the sleepy like to make excuses.”

**RB 27: 2-3** “Therefore, he ought to use every skill of a wise physician and send in senpectae, that is, mature and wise brothers who, under the cloak of secrecy, may support the wavering brother, urge him to be humble as a way of making satisfaction, and console him lest he be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow” (2 Cor 2:7).

**RB 27: 5-9** These verses explain the “the abbot’s responsibility to have great concern and to act with all speed, discernment and diligence in order not to lose any of the sheep entrusted to him.

**RB 31:13-19** This chapter explains the qualifications and the responsibilities of the monastery cellarer related to guests.

**RB 35:1** “The brothers should serve one another.”

**RB 36:1, 10** “Care of the sick must rank above and before all else, so that they may truly be served as Christ, for he said: I was sick and you visited me (Mt 25:36), and, What you did for one of these least brothers you did for me (Mt 25:40).”

**RB 53:1-24** “All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Mt 25:35).” This chapter explains the honor and courtesy that needs to be shown to guests and among monks in the community.

**RB 61:3-4** If the visiting monk is “simply content with what he finds, he should be received for as long a time as he wishes. He may, indeed, with all humility and love make some reasonable criticisms or observations, which the abbot should prudently consider; it is possible that the Lord guided him to the monastery for this very purpose.

**RB 64:21** “So that when he has ministered well he will hear from the Lord what that good servant heard who gave his fellow servants grain at the proper time.”

**RB 66:1-5** This chapter explains the necessary virtues of the porter whose position of responsibility places him at the entrance of the monastery.

**RB 72:4-12** This chapter describes the good zeal of the monks who show the pure love of brothers to each other and humble love to their abbot.

**RB 38:2** “After Mass and Communion, let the incoming reader ask all to pray for him so that God may shield him from the spirit of vanity.”

**RB 38:10-11** “Because of holy Communion and because the fast may be too hard for him to bear, the brother who is reader for the week is to receive some diluted wine before he begins to read. Afterward he will take his meal with the weekly kitchen servers and the attendants.”

**RB 58:17-29** This chapter explains the procedure for receiving brothers (Profession Mass mentioned in DeLatte’s commentary).

**RB 60:1-5** “If any ordained priest asks to be received in to the monastery, do not agree too quickly.” He must accept the “full discipline of the Rule...and allowed to stand next to the abbot, to give blessings and to celebrate Mass, provided that the abbot bids him.”

**RB 62:1-6** “Any abbot who asks to have a priest or deacon ordained should choose from his monks one worthy to exercise the priesthood.” This chapter also describes expectations and rules in regard to priests.

**RB 63:4** “Therefore, when the monks come for the kiss of peace and for Communion, when they lead psalms or stand in choir, they do so in the order decided by the abbot or already existing among them.”

**RB 72:1-12** St. Benedict describes the good zeal of monks and that they “are to prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to everlasting life.”

**RB 73:8** “Then with Christ’s help, keep this little rule that we have written for beginners.”

## Lesson 10: Hospitality

### INTRODUCTION

Pax!

The past lessons provided a foundation for the understanding of Benedictine spirituality along with the promises of conversion of heart, obedience, and stability. Other lessons included the life of St. Benedict and the importance of his Rule in the monastic community, as well as the significance of prayer, lectio divina, and the Liturgy of the Hours. One lesson focused on the Eucharist which is the source and summit of Christian prayer. Manual labor, intellectual labor, and other types of labor were also considered in the light of Benedictine spirituality.

This lesson considers Christian hospitality and leads us to look at our attitudes regarding the receiving and welcoming of others, whether the “other” is a complete stranger, a friend, or a member of our own family. Perhaps you have often been blessed with a welcome of warm, loving hospitality; at other times you may have suffered when another person did not give you full attention or treated you with suspicion or doubt. This lesson invites us to welcome Christ into our hearts, to know the loving hospitality of God, and with God’s grace to offer Christ’s mercy and love to others (as best we are able) throughout the course of each day.

May you find Christ’s peace in your life with a right balance and a healthy rhythm of prayer and work, with the prayerful reading of Scripture and the Rule, with the study of lessons, with silent listening to God, and with your association with the Benedictine community of monks and affiliated Oblates.

With open heart and steadfast love, may your love for Christ deepen and mature so that you bear much fruit and prepare to enter into everlasting life!

*Lesson Ten will consider welcoming the stranger as Christ (Mt 25:35; RB 53:1)*

### 1. PRAYER

(This section provides the prayer that is prayed every night at the beginning of Vigils in our monastery along with Old and New Testament passages. There are more passages at the end of this document. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

*Come, O Holy Spirit, replenish the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your divine love.*

*Excite, O Lord, in your Church, the Spirit which our Most Holy Father, St. Benedict served; that filled with the same, we may study to love what he loved and practice what he taught. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*“A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit” (Ps 51:12).*

### **1.1 Old Testament Scripture**

“You set a table before me in front of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Indeed, goodness and mercy will pursue me all the days of my life; I will dwell in the house of the LORD for endless days” (Ps 23: 5-6).

### **1.2 New Testament Scripture**

“He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Mt 22:37-39). “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me (Mt 25:40); “Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me” (Mt 25:45).

### **1.3 The Rule of St. Benedict**

“Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way; the love of Christ must come before all else. Never give a hollow greeting of peace or turn away when someone needs your love” (RB 4: 20-22, 25-26).

## **2. READINGS**

*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, [then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me. I will give the victor the right to sit with me on my throne, as I myself first won the victory and sit with my Father on his throne” (Rev 3:20-21).*

### **2.1 Hospitality in the Rule of the Master and in the Rule of St. Benedict**

Over the centuries in different cultures, hospitality has been either suppressed or encouraged when people either were threatened by strangers or had the courage to welcome them. Written after the fall of the Roman Empire at a time when barbarians freely roamed, the 6th-century Rule of the Master reflected an attitude of great

suspicion and a withdrawal of hospitality. “Guests who were thought to be spiritual men” may be “found to be thieves”; deans were to “keep an eye on strange brothers without their being aware of it”; and charge was given to “two so that during the night they may take turns watching over the strangers.” In the Rule of the Master, guests were “under surveillance” at all times so that “they do no mischief” (Rule of the Master, LXXIX).

Displaying a radical departure from the severity and negative attitude of the Rule of the Master, St. Benedict’s Rule “is often cited for promoting a long-standing tradition of ‘Benedictine hospitality’ to guests. Special care is to be shown in receiving ‘poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received’ (RB 53:15). The monks are to meet guests ‘with all the courtesy of love’ (RB 53:3). A visiting monk is to be ‘received for as long a time as he wishes,’ and even his criticisms, if reasonable, are to be heeded carefully as possible messages from the Lord (RB 61:3-4). The porter is always to be available to visitors with a spirit of gratitude for their presence and is to speak to them ‘with the warmth of love’ (RB 66:2-4). Furthermore, if we examine the Rule as a whole, there is also much evidence for the regular practice of hospitable service among the monks themselves amid the routines of everyday life. ‘The brothers should serve one another’ (RB 35:1). The abbot, the cellarer, and other monks should be highly concerned that the sick ‘truly be served as Christ’ (RB 36:1,10). All the brothers are quietly to encourage one another on arising for the Work of God (RB 22:8). The abbot, using *senpectae* (that is, those who can deal compassionately with a wayward monk), is to serve even the ‘wavering brother’ with such a hospitable loving outreach that he may be gently encouraged to reform his life and not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow (RB 27:2-3). Thus the routines and chores and problems of everyday life in the monastery provide innumerable opportunities of mutual hospitality as the monks compete in showing respect to others, bear patiently with one another’s weaknesses, and show one another ‘the pure love of brothers’”(RB 72:4-8) [Raila, p. 143-144].

## **2.2 Hospitality Expressed in History and Today**

The Greeks viewed hospitality as the characteristic of a civilized person. The early monks of the Egyptian and Syrian deserts who practiced lives of austerity and silence nevertheless would set aside their practices to welcome a visitor. The government of seventh century Ireland enacted the Brehon Law, which required all households to provide some measure of free hospitality at any hour; otherwise that household would be fined and suffer a great loss of reputation. Today the symbol of the pineapple is often used to show warm welcome and open hospitality that does not consider the cost.

## **2.3 Scripture’s Warnings Against Being Inhospitable**

However, the truth of the matter is that we live in an unpredictable and often impersonal world that threatens our security and cautions us to close our doors to the stranger. In our everyday relationships and interactions, we may feel that we need to be initially suspicious of the other person, whether that person is a stranger or even a member of our own family. Because of our fears, we may not be fully present to the other person and may avoid eye contact, may not fully listen, and may never be aware of that person's depth of need.

Scripture warns us of the danger of using the gift of hospitality in a self-righteous way to gain power over the person in need. This happens when we give of our surplus with an attitude of superiority that gives power to the giver. The Gospel of Luke speaks of the rich man who ignored the sufferings of the poor man Lazarus; upon his death, the rich man was left in torment, while Lazarus "was carried away by angels to the bosom of Abraham" (Lk 16:19-25). Jesus warns those who ignore the stranger, the hungry, and all those in need by saying, "Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me" (Mt 25:45). In contrast, "we who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves" (Rom 15:1). When we give from our need with an attitude of gratitude and humility, we are united in Christ with the receiver. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Mt 5:3, Lk 6:20).

## **2.4 The Meaning of Christian Hospitality**

There is a cost to hospitality; St. Benedict was willing to take that risk. He recognized that we are all needy, that we must rely on God's hospitality in all things, and that Christ's redeeming presence may be unexpectedly found in others. True hospitality may call us to suffer with our guest and open our hearts to accept his or her vulnerability, poverty, and need. This self-emptying however, when joined with the suffering of Christ, unites us in solidarity with Him and in the promise of His Resurrection. It brings to light the truth that each of us is equally a child of God and that all are given a place at the Lord's table. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, [then] I will enter his house and dine with him, and he with me. I will give the victor the right to sit with me on my throne, as I myself first won the victory and sit with my Father on his throne" (Rv 3:20-21). Christ's victory is experienced here on earth in big and in small ways when we open ourselves up to the presence of God in our prayer and in our encounters with others in the common everyday circumstances of life.

## **2.5 Examples of Hospitality in Scripture**

In the Old Testament there are many examples of hospitality. There are the stories of Abraham's running to welcome the three angelic visitors and Sarah's baking bread for their meal (Gn 18:1-8), of Lot's greeting the two angels and welcoming them to come to a banquet in his home (Gn 19:1-3), of the widow of Zarephath's setting aside her fear of death to use her last handful of flour and bit of oil to bake bread for Elijah (1 Kgs 17:10-16), and of Raguel giving a lavish welcome to his kinsman Tobiah (Tob 7:9-17). The prophet Isaiah announces God's desire for us to show hospitality to one another: "Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking off every yoke? Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your house; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own flesh? If you lavish your food on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; then your light shall rise in the darkness, and your gloom shall become like midday; then the LORD will guide you always and satisfy your thirst in parched places, will give strength to your bones and you shall be like a watered garden, like a flowing spring whose waters never fail" (Is 58:6-7; 10-11).

## **2.6 Hospitality in the Early Christian Church**

Hospitality in the New Testament is rooted in Jesus' words to his disciples, "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:37-39). Such hospitality is shown in Jesus' actions as He welcomed all to come to Him and to sit at table with Him (cf. Lk 5:27-29, Lk 15:1-2). Samaritans and Galileans came to Jesus and welcomed Him; they invited Him to stay with them (Jn 4:40 Jn 4:45). Jesus welcomed into dialogue the Pharisee Nicodemus, who came to him in the night with the question about being born again (Jn 3:1-2). Christ's openness and welcome to all is climaxed in His acceptance of suffering and death on the Cross. Such inclusive love is also found in the pure heart of Mary, whose whole life reflected her reply to the angel: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38). The great hospitality of God is revealed in the father of the prodigal son as he calls for a feast when the son who was lost returns home (Lk 15: 11-32). Jesus asks the Samaritan woman, an outcast in the eyes of most Jews, for water; she unexpectedly finds the loving hospitality of God, opens her heart to accept Jesus, and quickly shares the news of her encounter with the Messiah with others (Jn 4:7-30). Two different types of hospitality were shown by the sisters Martha and Mary; Martha managed the practical details of welcoming Jesus to their home, while Mary sat and listened to Jesus' words (Lk 10:38-42). After the Resurrection, the disciples experienced the hospitality of Christ as they walked on the road to Emmaus and broke bread with the stranger whom they came to know as Christ Himself (Lk 24:13-35).

## 2.7 The Meaning of Christian Hospitality

Authentic Christian hospitality finds its source in the words of Jesus: “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35). “The Lord asks us to love as He does, even our enemies, to make ourselves the neighbor of those farthest away, and to love children and the poor as Christ Himself” (CCC, #1825, cf. #1822, # 1826-1827). The early Christian Church was known for great hospitality in caring for the poor, in offering shelter for the homeless, and in providing food and spiritual nourishment for the imprisoned. There are many New Testament passages which speak of hospitality to those within the Christian community and to strangers. In helping those in need, Christians hear the encouragement of Christ: “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40). In bearing “one another’s burdens,” Christians “fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2) and rise to the call to “be merciful, just as [also] your Father is merciful. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you” (Lk 6:36,38). The first Christians strove to love others as themselves and to look for Christ in all (cf. Heb 13:1-3).

Hospitality can be defined as a loving, attentive, and intentional availability and receptivity to another person. Authentic hospitality happens when we recognize our own personal neediness, when we act in faith that Christ’s love is greater than our fears, and when we set aside personal judgment to offer acceptance and mercy. It demands docility along with an act of faith so that we may attend to others “with the ear of the heart” (RB Prol: 1). In every situation, Christ is present and our interaction with others brings with it the blessing of an opportunity to receive Him. Christian hospitality means living our lives in a sacramental way so that God may meet us and we may encounter God in our relationships with others.

In Christian hospitality our “way of acting should be different from the world’s way”; we should “never give a hollow greeting of peace or turn away when someone needs our love” (RB 4: 20, 25-26). Without God’s help, we could never be equipped to do this tremendous and glorious task. We are inadequate in ourselves; so Christ calls us to open the door of our hearts just as the Roman centurion did in his reply, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant will be healed” (Mt 8:8). Before receiving the Lord in the Eucharist, in faith we pray, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed” (The Roman Missal, 2011). Amazing things happen when we open our hearts to encounter Christ and to experience His presence and love through our encounters with others in daily life.

## 2.8 Hospitality When Working Alone

Our daily work may call us to hospitality of a different type; if we work alone, “the care and reverence that we put into our work render it a genuine service of hospitality to Christ, to those affected by our work, and ultimately to all the members of Christ’s Body” (Raila, p. 144). We are able to deliver our “work into His hands, to make each deed a sacrificial offering to Him, and to know in faith that even the most routine duty is a wonderful opportunity to be hospitable to others and to provide them with loving service, whether visible or hidden. Of course, to practice such hospitality requires sufficient time for prayer, in which we come to know the loving hospitality of God Himself, Who alone can give us the grace to share His divine hospitality with others” (Raila, p. 142).

## **2.9 Prudence in Hospitality**

As in all things, the virtue of prudence should be present in our gifts of hospitality. We may stop to listen and to look into the eyes of others and yet find that brief attention and prayer are the only forms of hospitality that we are able to offer at that moment. At other times we may find ourselves in a situation in which a needy person should be referred to someone else who can provide assistance. In those circumstances we are like the Good Samaritan, who acted with compassion and mercy to the man who was beaten and left half-dead by the road; he cared for him as he was able, took him to the innkeeper for more care, and promised to return to him on his way back (cf. Lk 10:29-37).

## **2.10 The Necessity of Faith in Welcoming the Stranger**

In the stranger there exists ambiguity and the unknown. It takes faith to seek God in the face of a stranger, and sometimes even in the face of a familiar person when we do not understand his or her motives or intentions. “To welcome the stranger is an act of faith; such faith helps us in general to meet the ‘otherness’ of life, not as a threat but as a possible gift.”

## **2.11 God as the Ultimate Stranger**

The ultimate stranger is God, Who is not under our control and Who may act in surprising ways! However, all of God’s ways lead us to Him. With humility, gratitude, and confidence we can make a home for Christ and invite Him into our hearts; with His presence, we can become instruments of His love and hospitality in the world. “True hospitality means opening not just our homes but our very selves to others, so that we make them feel welcome, give them our time, allow them to become what God envisions for them, and thus help to restore some measure of balance, wholeness, and dignity to their lives.

## **2.12 Limitations in Christian Hospitality**

Since we are limited human beings, however, our hospitality cannot be unlimited. We all have limited time and energy. We cannot give beyond the resources that we have despite our good intentions. To try to spend ourselves beyond our capacity could be counterproductive. In St. Benedict's monastery certain monks are assigned the ministry of hospitality. In RB 53:23-24, the ordinary monk is not even allowed to speak with guests. That seemingly cold behavior represents the need to keep a balanced, ordered life in community and family and to prevent extension of the members to the point that their life is disrupted beyond reasonable limits. The precept also reminds us that hospitality is often a communal endeavor and that we all often need to depend on others to do the generous work that we ourselves cannot do. In many locations one cannot prudently welcome a random stranger into one's house; one needs to keep one's house safe from criminals and other potential intruders.

## **2.13 Hospitality Involving Government and Social Service Agencies**

Part of our practice of hospitality involves supporting causes in our community and nation that offer hospitality in ways involving the government and social-service agencies. For example, amid current controversies about immigrants and refugees, Catholic social teaching requires that our nation should be receptive to people from other nations who are sincerely fleeing oppression, terrorism, or abject poverty. We need to support such endeavors and especially favor efforts to keep families together. On the other hand, we must realize that our nation, like other nations, needs to be cautious about genuine threats from terrorists and other criminal elements. There must be appropriate restrictions, which do not go against Christian charity.

## **2.14 Hospitality in Everyday Practice**

On a practical level, there are many ways to practice hospitality other than welcoming people into our homes. Driving on the road provides an excellent opportunity to practice hospitality to other drivers, even those who may annoy us. In an era of "road rage", driving peacefully and prayerfully and not responding violently to violence can help to bring sanity, peace, and safety to our roadways. We can learn to drive in a Christian manner if we are not already doing so. We can learn to see the people in other vehicles as people and not just as threats or impersonal objects of our irritation.

## **2.15 Sacred Nature of Hospitality at Meals**

Meals are a natural setting for the practice of hospitality. Whether at home, in others' homes, or in restaurants, courtesy and loving attention to other diners' needs contribute to the sacred nature of every meal. It hardly needs to be said that the use of

cell phones or other electronic gadgets during a meal is a serious offense against charity and hospitality. At Oblate events involving meals, it is important that “strangers” be made welcome. Sometimes people tend to gravitate to tables where they see people whom they already know. However, such a natural tendency can lead newcomers to feel isolated and can deprive others of encountering the beauty of other persons whom they have not yet come to know. Oblates are especially encouraged at such events to be attentive to the importance of mingling with those with whom they are unfamiliar – and thus encountering other members of the Body of Christ.

## **2.16 Hospitality and Our Christian Culture**

Hospitality requires us to make room for guests in our hearts and in our homes; we are to make room for our guests as they are. It is also very important for us to maintain our Christian culture in our homes. The culture of the monastery does not change with the entrance of a guest; our homes should not change with the arrival of a guest. We have authority over the culture of our homes; if a guest is completely disrespectful to our Christian culture, we may kindly ask that guest to leave. When we are generous to our guests, serve them with humility, and lavish them with our attention and care, we are honoring the mystery of God in each person. We acknowledge that person’s infinite dignity when we humbly listen to his or her life history and accept questions and concerns. By opening ourselves to relationship, we diminish separation and increase unity for all in Christ. Hospitality allows for the gift of self in Christ; our faith should be strengthened, and our guests should leave in a better state than when they arrived.

## **2.17 Hospitality and the Glory of God**

“The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; He has sent me to bring good news to the afflicted, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God; to comfort all who mourn; to place on those who mourn in Zion a diadem instead of ashes, to give them oil of gladness instead of mourning, a glorious mantle instead of a faint spirit” (Is 61:1-3). In offering hospitality to all, we may receive more than what we expect; we may receive the very presence of Christ Himself. “Did I not tell you that if you believe you will see the glory of God?” (Jn 11:40). “Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God” (Rom 15:7).

## **3. SUMMARY**

### **3.1 Hospitality in the Rule of the Master and in the Rule of St. Benedict**

- A. The Rule of the Master, an early 6th-century monastic rule, reflected an attitude of suspicion toward strangers.
  - 1. Guests who seemed to be spiritual men could have been thieves.
  - 2. Monks were charged to keep an eye on guests day and night.
  - 3. Surveillance was felt to be necessary so that the guests would do no mischief.
- B. St. Benedict's Rule was a radical departure from the severity and negative attitude of the Rule of the Master.
  - 1. Special care is to be shown to "poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received" (RB 53:15).
  - 2. The monks are to meet guests "with all the courtesy of love" (RB 53:3).
  - 3. A visiting monk is to be "received for as long a time as he wishes," and his criticisms, if reasonable, are to be heeded carefully as possible messages from the Lord (RB 61:3-4).
  - 4. The porter is to be available and to have the spirit of gratitude in greeting guests "with the warmth of love" (RB 66:2-4).
  - 5. "The brothers should serve one another" (RB 35:1).
  - 6. The abbot, cellarer, and other monks should show concern and care for the sick that they be "truly served as Christ" (RB 36: 1,10).
  - 7. All the brothers should quietly encourage one another on arising for the Work of God (RB 22:8).
  - 8. Using *senpectae* (those who can gently approach a wayward monk), the abbot is to serve the "wavering brother" with a hospitable loving outreach so that he may gently be encouraged to reform his life and not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow (RB 27:2-3).
  - 9. The monks are to show one another "the pure love of brothers" in performing the routines and chores of everyday life (RB 72:4-8) [See Raila, p. 143-144].
  - 10. All are to attend to God's word "with the ear of the heart" (RB Prol:1).

### 3.2 Hospitality Expressed in History and Today

- A. Hospitality has been expressed throughout history.
  - 1. The Greeks viewed hospitality as a characteristic of a civilized person.
  - 2. The early monks of the Egyptian and Syrian deserts would set aside their religious practices of silence and austerity to welcome a visitor.

3. The government of seventh century Ireland enacted the Brehon Law, which required every household to provide some form of free hospitality or else be penalized with a fine and suffer the loss of good reputation.

4. The symbol of the pineapple is used today to show warm welcome and hospitality without consideration of the cost.

B. Hospitality is threatened in our world today.

1. Our unpredictable and impersonal world threatens our feeling of security.

2. We may experience fear and may close our doors to strangers.

3. We may feel initially suspicious of the other person, whether he be a stranger or even a member of our own family.

4. Suspicion may result in our not being fully present to the other person; we may avoid eye contact, may not fully listen, and may never be aware of the person's depth of need.

### 3.3 Scripture's Warnings Against Being Inhospitable

A. "We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves" (Rom 15:1).

B. The rich man ignores the sufferings of Lazarus who sits by his door (Lk 16:19-25).

C. "Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me" (Mt 25:45).

D. There is danger in using the gift of hospitality in a self-righteous way to gain power over the person in need.

### 3.4 The Meaning of Christian Hospitality

A. Hospitality involves a personal cost; St. Benedict was willing to take that risk.

B. We must rely on God's hospitality at all times and in all situations.

C. Christ's redeeming presence can be found in others.

D. Hospitality may cause us to suffer with the stranger as we open our hearts to the stranger's vulnerability, poverty, and need.

E. Our suffering can be joined with Christ's sufferings; all can experience solidarity in Him.

F. We should realize that each of us is a child of God, regardless of our status or sinfulness.

- G. Christ stands at the door of our heart and knocks; he wishes to enter our “house and dine with us” and to give us the right to sit with Him on His throne beside the Father (Rv 3:20-21).

### 3.5 Examples of Hospitality in Scripture

- A. There are many examples of hospitality in the Old Testament.

1. Abraham runs to greet the three angelic visitors and Sarah bakes bread for them (Gn 18:1-8).
2. Lot greets the two angels and welcomes them to come into his home for a banquet (Gn 19:1-3).
3. The widow of Zarephath sets aside fear of death to use her last handful of flour and bit of oil to bake bread for Elijah (1 Kgs 17:10-16).
4. Raguel gives a lavish welcome to his kinsman Tobiah (Tob 7:9-17).
5. The prophet Isaiah announces God’s desire for us to show hospitality (Is 58: 6-7; 10-11).

- B. Hospitality in the New Testament is revealed first and foremost in Jesus’ words, “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself”(Mt 22:37-39).

1. Jesus welcomed all to come and to sit at table with Him (Lk 5:27-29; Lk 15:1-2).
2. Samaritans and Galileans came to Jesus, welcomed Him, and invited Him to stay with them (Jn 4: 40).
3. Jesus welcomed the Pharisee Nicodemus, who came to him at midnight (Jn 3:1-2).
4. Christ’s ultimate act of hospitality was His suffering and death on the Cross.
5. Next to Jesus, Mary is the perfect example of human hospitality (Lk 1:38).
6. The hospitality of God the Father is revealed in the father’s welcome of the prodigal son (Lk 15:11-32).
7. The Samaritan woman at the well sees the loving hospitality of the Messiah, opens her heart to receive Jesus, and shares the news about her encounter with others (Jn 4:7-30).
8. Two different types of hospitality are shown in Martha and Mary (Lk 10:38-42).

9. After the Resurrection, in walking and talking with a stranger and in the breaking of bread, the disciples discover Christ Himself (Lk 24:13-35).

### 3.6 Hospitality in the Early Christian Church

- A. Early Christians cared for the poor, offered shelter for the homeless, and provided food and spiritual nourishment for the imprisoned.
- B. “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (Jn 13:35).
- C. “The Lord asks us to love as He does, even our enemies, to make ourselves the neighbor of those farthest away, and to love children and the poor as Christ Himself” (CCC, #1825, cf. #1822, #1826-1827).
- D. “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40).
- E. In bearing “one another’s burdens,” Christians “fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal 6:2) and rise to the call to “be merciful, just as [also] your Father is merciful” (Lk 6:36).
- F. For the measure with which you measure will in return be measured out to you” (Lk 6:38).
- G. The early Christians strove to love and to treat others as they would wish to be treated and to look for Christ in one another (Heb 13:1-3).

### 3.7 The Meaning of Christian Hospitality

- A. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 5:3; cf. Lk 6:20).
- B. Hospitality involves loving, attentive, and intentional availability to the other person.
- C. Hospitality involves recognition of our own neediness for God and of His sending of the other person as a gift.
- D. Hospitality begins with an act of faith, with trust that Christ’s love is greater than our fears.
- E. Hospitality sets aside personal judgment so that mercy may be offered.
- F. Hospitality involves docility and openness to the blessing of an opportunity to receive Christ in the stranger.
- G. Hospitality means living our lives in a sacramental way so that God meets us and we encounter God in our relationships with one another.

- H. Hospitality involves a way of acting that is “different from the world’s way” (RB 4:20).
- I. “Never give a hollow greeting of peace or turn away when someone needs our love” (RB 4: 25-26).
- J. In the Mass we welcome Christ by saying, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed” (The Roman Missal, 2011).

### 3.8 Hospitality When Working Alone

- A. “The care and reverence that we put into our work render it a genuine service of hospitality to Christ, to those affected by our work, and ultimately to all the members of Christ’s Body” (Raila, p. 144).
- B. We may deliver our “work into His hands, to make each deed a sacrificial offering to Him, and to know in faith that even the most routine duty is a wonderful opportunity to be hospitable to others and to provide them with loving service, whether visible or hidden” (Raila, p.142).
- C. Such an attitude toward work “requires sufficient time for prayer, in which we come to know the loving hospitality of God Himself, Who alone can give us the grace to share His divine hospitality with others” (Raila, p. 142).

### 3.9 Prudence in Hospitality

- A. We may stop to listen and look into the eyes of another; we may realize that such brief contact and prayer are the only forms of hospitality that we can offer at that time.
- B. We may not be capable of providing for a stranger and may refer him or her to another as did the Good Samaritan who acted with compassion after finding the man beaten and left for half-dead by the road (Lk 10:29-37).

### 3.10 The Necessity of Faith in Welcoming the Stranger

- A. Ambiguity and the unknown exist in the stranger.
- B. Faith is needed to see God in the face of a stranger.
- C. Faith is needed to see God in a familiar person; we never fully understand his or her motives or intentions.
- D. “To welcome the stranger is an act of faith; such faith helps us in general to meet the ‘otherness’ of life, not as a threat but as a possible gift” (Oblate Formation Booklet, Chapter 4, H., 3.).

### 3.11 God as the Ultimate Stranger

- A. God is not under our control.
- B. God acts in surprising ways and all of God's ways lead us to Him.
- C. With sincere humility and gratitude, we can confidently make a home for Christ and invite Him into our hearts.
- D. With His presence, we can become instruments of His love and hospitality in the world.
- E. "True hospitality means opening not just our homes but our very selves to others, so that we make them feel welcome, give them our time, allow them to become what God envisions for them, and thus help to restore some measure of balance, wholeness, and dignity to their lives" (Oblate Formation Booklet, Chapter 4,H., 3.).

### 3.12 Limitations in Christian Hospitality

- A. As human beings, we have limited time, energy, and resources; therefore, our hospitality cannot be unlimited.
- B. To spend ourselves beyond our capacity could be counterproductive.
- C. In the monastery, certain monks are assigned the ministry of hospitality (RB 53:23-24).
- D. Hospitality is often a communal endeavor to keep balance and order.
- E. Prudence should be used when welcoming a stranger into one's house; one needs to keep safe from criminals and other potential intruders.

### 3.13 Hospitality Involving Government and Social Service Agencies

- A. Hospitality involves supporting causes in our community and nation.
- B. Catholic social teaching requires our nation to be receptive to immigrants and refugees sincerely fleeing oppression, terrorism, or abject poverty.
- C. Appropriate restrictions are needed which do not go against Christian charity.

### 3.14 Hospitality in Everyday Practice

- A. Hospitality asks us to drive peacefully on our roads.
- B. Recognize the people in other cars as people and not as threats or impersonal objects.
- C. Respond to adverse situations peacefully and with prayer; avoid responding violently to violence.

### 3.15 Sacred Nature of Hospitality at Meals

- A. Meals are a natural setting for the practice of hospitality.

- B. It is important to give courtesy and loving attention to others' needs while at table.
- C. At Oblate events, it is important to welcome "strangers" rather than gravitating to tables where we find familiar faces.
- D. By reaching out to those with whom we are not as familiar, we encounter other members of the Body of Christ.

### 3.16 Hospitality and Our Christian Culture

- A. Make room for guests in our hearts and homes; welcome guests as they are.
- B. Maintain authority over our Christian culture in our homes.
- C. The culture of the monastery does not change with the entrance of a guest.
- D. We should kindly ask a guest to leave if he or she is completely disrespectful.
- E. Our generosity, humility, and attention honor the mystery of God in the guest.
- F. The guest's infinite dignity is revered when we listen to his or her life story and are open to receive questions and concerns.
- G. Relationships diminish separation and increase unity for all in Christ.
- H. In hospitality, our faith should be strengthened; our guest should leave in a better state than when he or she arrived.

### 3.17 Hospitality and the Glory of God

- A. We are sent to "bring good news to the afflicted," "to proclaim liberty to the captives," "to comfort all who mourn," to give "a glorious mantle instead of a faint spirit" to those who mourn (Is 61:1-3).
- B. God's glory is found in His lavish gifts; we always receive far more than we can expect or imagine.
- C. Christ is waiting for us to invite him into our hearts and to know His presence.
- D. Christ assures us that if we believe, we "will see the glory of God" (Jn 11:40).
- E. "Welcome one another, then, as Christ welcomed you, for the glory of God" (Rom 15:7).
- F. "Let all guests be received as Christ" (inscription on Leander Hall guest entrance door, RB 53:1).

## 4. SUPPLEMENTARY READING

### 4.1 Hospitality

St. Benedict urged his monks to welcome all guests as Christ (RB 53:1) and to show special concern "in receiving poor people and pilgrims, because in them more particularly Christ is received" (53:13). Likewise, the Oblate is called to welcome Christ in every person coming into his or her life. To welcome the stranger is an act of faith; such faith helps us in general to greet the "otherness" of life, not as a threat but as a possible gift. God is the ultimate Stranger -- unpredictable and potentially threatening to our security yet also promising us new life as we stretch ourselves out to meet Him. True hospitality means opening not just our homes but our very selves to others, so that we make them feel welcome, give them our time, allow them to become what God envisions for them, and thus help to restore some measure of balance, wholeness, and dignity to their lives. People in our hectic, impersonal world really need the warmth of genuine hospitality that will give them a new vision of life and a glimpse of God.

## 5. SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

### Books

Fr. Daniel Homan, O.S.B., and Lonni Collins Pratt, *Radical Hospitality* (Paraclete Press)

Fr. Fidelis Ruppert, O.S.B., and Fr. Anselm Grün, O.S.B., *Christ in the Brother* (BMH Publications)

Fr. Donald S. Raila, O.S.B., *Lessons from Saint Benedict: Finding Joy in Daily Life*, Sacred Winds Press, 2011

Sister M. Dolores Dowling, O.S.B., "Instructions for Benedictine Oblates," Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, Tucson, AZ.

Daniel Rees and Other Members of the English Benedictine Congregation, *Consider Your Call: A Theology of Monastic Life Today* (Cistercian Studies Series), 1978.

Tolbert McCarroll, "Humanizing Humility: RB 7: A Psychology of Spiritual Growth," *Benedictines*, Fall-Winter 1980/81.

*The Rule of the Master*, Cisterian Publications, 1977.

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, #1822, #1825-1827), United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1994. (Also available online from United States Conference of Catholic Bishops [www.ccc.usccb.org](http://www.ccc.usccb.org)).

### YouTube

The Importance of [Hospitality](#), by Father Donald S. Raila, O.S.B.

Eat Together [Commercial](#)

What St. Benedict Teaches Us About Hospitality by Sr. Lorane, member of St. Martin's Monastery in Rapid City

Fr. Killian Loch, O.S.B., Director of Campus Ministry at Saint Vincent College speaks about the Rich Ways of Hospitality at minute 11:51

Life Lived Abundantly: Benedictine Wisdom from Mount Angel Abbey, Hospitality a Call to Openness at minute 13:10

There is Room at the Table Song by by Carrie Newcomer

## 6. REFLECTION QUESTIONS

This [link](#) provides an opportunity to share your responses to a few questions after you have read, reflected on and prayed over a lesson's topic. (It is not required to provide answers to the questions but Oblate Novices are encouraged to do so.)

### **Oblates & Genuine Conversion**

This section contains two factual questions; all answers are found in that lesson or pertain to it.

- 1. How is Christian hospitality different from the common hospitality that is found in the world? Why is Christian hospitality considered to be a radical form of hospitality?**
- 2. Christian hospitality is considered to be sacramental. Who is our model of hospitality? Why?**

### **Personal Conversion of Life**

This section contains your choice of one reflection question. Please reply to one of the following three questions (though you are welcome to reply to more than one, if you wish):

- 3. Are you aware of self-centered motives that are obstacles for you in expressing hospitality to others? In what ways can you establish order and balance in your daily life to practice greater listening and receptivity (more hospitality) in dealing with members of your family (or your friends, or your co-workers, or strangers whom you encounter during the day)?**
- 4. Choose one Scriptural passage that refers to hospitality and explain how that passage may point to the form of hospitality that comes from God alone. How does this passage have meaning for you and apply to your life today?**

**5. Christian hospitality is considered to be sacramental. Based on passages in the Rule, in what ways is hospitality expressed among the monks within the monastic community and to visitors who come to the monastery grounds?**

## **APPENDIX 10 – Additional Optional References for Lesson 10**

### **Full Texts of Scripture and Rule Verses**

(This section provides more passages from the Old and New Testament and the Holy Rule. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

#### **Old Testament Scripture**

**Ps 23: 5-6** ‘You set a table before me in front of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Indeed, goodness and mercy will pursue me all the days of my life; I will dwell in the house of the LORD for endless days.’

**Gn 18:2-8** “Looking up, he [Abraham] saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the entrance of the tent to greet them; and bowing to the ground, he said: ‘Sir, if it please you, do not go on past your servant. Let some water be brought, that you may bathe your feet, and then rest under the tree. Now that you have come to your servant, let me bring you a little food that you may refresh yourselves; and afterward you may go on your way.’ ‘Very well,’ they replied, ‘do as you have said.’ Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah and said, ‘Quick, three measures of bran flour! Knead it and make bread.’ He ran to the herd, picked out a tender, choice calf, and gave it to a servant, who quickly prepared it. Then he got some curds and milk, as well as the calf that had been prepared, and set these before them, waiting on them under the tree while they ate.”

**Gn 19:1-3** “The two angels reached Sodom in the evening, as Lot was sitting at the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he got up to greet them; and bowing down with his face to the ground, he said, ‘Please, my lords, come aside into your servant’s house for the night, and bathe your feet; you can get up early to continue your journey.’ But they replied, ‘No, we will pass the night in the town square.’ He urged them so strongly, however, that they turned aside to his place and entered his house. He prepared a banquet for them, baking unleavened bread, and they dined.”

**Ex 12:49** “There will be one law for the native and for the alien residing among you.”

**Lv 19:9-10** “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not be so thorough that you reap the field to its very edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. Likewise, you shall not pick your vineyard bare, nor gather up the grapes that have

fallen. These things you shall leave for the poor and the alien. I, the LORD, am your God.”

**Lv 19:33-34** “When an alien resides with you in your land, do not mistreat such a one. You shall treat the alien who resides with you no differently than the natives born among you; you shall love the alien as yourself; for you too were once aliens in the land of Egypt. I, the LORD, am your God.” Dt 8:3-4 “He therefore let you be afflicted with hunger, and then fed you with manna, a food unknown to you and your ancestors, so you might know that it is not by bread alone that people live, but by all that comes forth from the mouth of the LORD. The clothing did not fall from you in tatters, nor did your feet swell these forty years.”

**Dt 15:7-8, 10** “If one of your kindred is in need in any community in the land which the LORD, your God, is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor close your hand against your kin who is in need. Instead, you shall freely open your hand and generously lend what suffices to meet that need. When you give, give generously and not with a stingy heart; for that, the LORD, your God, will bless you in all your works and undertakings.”

**Dt 26:12** “When you have finished setting aside all the tithes of your produce in the third year, the year of the tithes, and have given them to the Levite, the resident alien, the orphan and the widow, that they may eat and be satisfied in your own communities...”

**1 Sm 25:6** “Say to him, ‘Peace be with you, my brother, and with your family, and with all who belong to you.’”

**1 Kgs 17:10-16** “He arose and went to Zarephath. When he arrived at the entrance of the city, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called out to her, ‘Please bring me a small cupful of water to drink.’ She left to get it, and he called out after her, ‘Please bring along a crust of bread.’ She said, ‘As the LORD, your God, lives, I have nothing baked; there is only a handful of flour in my jar and a little oil in my jug. Just now I was collecting a few sticks, to go in and prepare something for myself and my son; when we have eaten it, we shall die.’ Elijah said to her, ‘Do not be afraid. Go and do as you have said. But first make me a little cake and bring it to me. Afterwards you can prepare something for yourself and your son. For the LORD, the God of Israel, says: The jar of flour shall not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, until the day when the LORD sends rain upon the earth.’ She left and did as Elijah had said. She had enough to eat for a long time—he and she and her household. The jar of flour did not go empty, nor the jug of oil run dry, according to the word of the LORD spoken through Elijah.”

**Tb 4:7** “Give alms from your possessions. Do not turn your face away from any of the poor, so that God’s face will not be turned away from you.”

**Ps 68:6-7** “Father of the fatherless, defender of widows—God in his holy abode, God gives a home to the forsaken, who leads prisoners out to prosperity, while rebels live in the desert.”

**Ps 146:6-9** “The maker of heaven and earth, the seas and all that is in them, Who keeps faith forever, secures justice for the oppressed, who gives bread to the hungry. The LORD sets prisoners free; the LORD gives sight to the blind. The LORD raises up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous. The LORD protects the resident alien, comes to the aid of the orphan and the widow, but thwarts the way of the wicked.”

**Prv 19:17** “Whoever cares for the poor lends to the LORD, who will pay back the sum in full.”

**Wis 19:13** “And the punishments came upon the sinners not without forewarnings from the violence of the thunderbolts. For they justly suffered for their own misdeeds, since they treated their guests with the more grievous hatred.”

**Is 58:6-7; 10-11** “Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking off every yoke? Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your house; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own flesh? If you lavish your food on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; then your light shall rise in the darkness, and your gloom shall become like midday; then the LORD will guide you always and satisfy your thirst in parched places, will give strength to your bones and you shall be like a watered garden, like a flowing spring whose waters never fail.”

**Is 61:1-3** “The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; He has sent me to bring good news to the afflicted, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, release to the prisoners, to announce a year of favor from the LORD and a day of vindication by our God; to comfort all who mourn; to place on those who mourn in Zion a diadem instead of ashes, to give them oil of gladness instead of mourning, a glorious mantle instead of a faint spirit.”

**Jer 22:3** “Thus says the LORD: Do what is right and just. Rescue the victims from the hand of their oppressors. Do not wrong or oppress the resident alien, the orphan, or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.”

**Zec 7:10** “Do not oppress the widow or the orphan, the resident alien or the poor; do not plot evil against one another in your hearts.”

### **New Testament Scripture**

**Mt 22:37-39** “He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

**Mt 25:40** “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”

**Mt. 25:45** “Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me.”

**Mt 5:41-42** “Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go with him for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.”

**Mt 5:46-48** “For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

**Mt 8:11** “I say to you, many will come from the east and the west, and will recline with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the banquet in the kingdom of heaven.”

**Mt 10:7-8,12** “As you go, make this proclamation: ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give. As you enter a house, wish it peace.”

**Mt 20: 26-28** “Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave. Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

**Mt 25:34-40** “Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me. Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’”

**Lk 5:27-29** “After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the customs post. He said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him. Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were at table with them.”

**Lk 6:30** “Give to everyone who asks of you, and from the one who takes what is yours do not demand it back.”

**Lk 14:13-14** “Rather, when you hold a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; blessed indeed will you be because of their inability to repay you.”

**Lk 15:1-2** “The tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to him, but the Pharisees and scribes began to complain, saying, ‘This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.’”

**Lk 19:2-7** “Now a man there named Zacchaeus, who was a chief tax collector and also a wealthy man, was seeking to see who Jesus was; but he could not see him because of the crowd, for he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree in order to see Jesus, who was about to pass that way. When he reached the place, Jesus looked up and said to him, ‘Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house.’ And he came down quickly and received him with joy. When they all saw this, they began to grumble, saying, ‘He has gone to stay at the house of a sinner.’”

**Lk 22:27-30** “For who is greater: the one seated at table or the one who serves? Is it not the one seated at table? I am among you as the one who serves. It is you who have stood by me in my trials; and I confer a kingdom on you, just as my Father has conferred one on me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom; and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

**Acts 2:44-47** “All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one’s need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people.”

**Rom 12:12-13** “Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality.”

**Rom 15:1** “We who are strong ought to put up with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves.”

**Heb 13:1-3** “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect hospitality, for through it some have unknowingly entertained angels. Be mindful of prisoners as if sharing their imprisonment, and of the ill-treated as of yourselves, for you also are in the body.”

**Jas 2: 1-5** “My brothers, show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. For if a man with gold rings on his fingers and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and a poor person in shabby clothes also comes in, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say, ‘Sit here, please,’ while you say to the poor one, ‘Stand there,’ or ‘Sit at my feet,’ have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil designs? Listen, my beloved brothers. Did not God choose those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?”

**Jas 2:14-17** “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,’ but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

**1 Pt 4:9-10** “Be hospitable to one another without complaining. As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace.”

**3 John 1:5** “Beloved, you are faithful in all you do for the brothers, especially for strangers; they have testified to your love before the church. Please help them in a way worthy of God to continue their journey.”

### **The Rule of St. Benedict**

**RB 4: 20-22, 25-26** “Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way; the love of Christ must come before all else. Never give a hollow greeting of peace or turn away when someone needs your love.”

**RB 4:10-19** “Renounce yourself in order to follow Christ (Mt 16:24; Lk 9:23); discipline your body (1 Cor 9:27); do not pamper yourself, but love fasting. You must relieve the lot of the poor, clothe the naked, visit the sick (Mt 25:36), and bury the dead. Go to help the troubled and console the sorrowing.”

**RB 4:20-22,25-26** “Your way of acting should be different from the world’s way; the love of Christ must come before all else. Never give a hollow greeting of peace or turn away when someone needs your love.”

**RB 22:8** “On arising for the Work of God, they will quietly encourage each other, for the sleepy like to make excuses.”

**RB 27: 2-3** “Therefore, he ought to use every skill of a wise physician and send in *senpectae*, that is, mature and wise brothers who, under the cloak of secrecy, may support

the wavering brother, urge him to be humble as a way of making satisfaction, and console him lest he be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow” (2 Cor 2:7).

**RB 27: 5-9** These verses explain the “the abbot’s responsibility to have great concern and to act with all speed, discernment and diligence in order not to lose any of the sheep entrusted to him.

**RB 31:13-19** This chapter explains the qualifications and the responsibilities of the monastery cellarer related to guests.

**RB 35:1** “The brothers should serve one another.”

**RB 36:1, 10** “Care of the sick must rank above and before all else, so that they may truly be served as Christ, for he said: I was sick and you visited me (Mt 25:36), and, What you did for one of these least brothers you did for me (Mt 25:40).”

**RB 53:1-24** “All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Mt 25:35).” This chapter explains the honor and courtesy that needs to be shown to guests and among monks in the community.

**RB 61:3-4** If the visiting monk is “simply content with what he finds, he should be received for as long a time as he wishes. He may, indeed, with all humility and love make some reasonable criticisms or observations, which the abbot should prudently consider; it is possible that the Lord guided him to the monastery for this very purpose.

**RB 64:21** “So that when he has ministered well he will hear from the Lord what that good servant heard who gave his fellow servants grain at the proper time.”

**RB 66:1-5** This chapter explains the necessary virtues of the porter whose position of responsibility places him at the entrance of the monastery.

**RB 72:4-12** This chapter describes the good zeal of the monks who show the pure love of brothers to each other and humble love to their abbot.

## Lesson 11: Invitation to Silence

### INTRODUCTION

Previous lessons have discussed the Benedictine promises of *conversatio morum* (conversion of heart), obedience, and stability. Study of St. Benedict's life and his Rule has given us insight into the meaning of holiness, prayer, *lectio divina*, and the Liturgy of the Hours and has provided a greater understanding of the culmination of our worship, which is the Eucharist. As Benedictine Oblates we are called in Christ, and according to the Rule of St. Benedict, to practice these aspects of Benedictine spirituality in the midst of our work, prayer, and service of others.

This lesson explains how some exterior and interior silence is necessary so that we may dispose ourselves to God, for it is most especially in silence that God reveals Himself to us. God invites us to have complete faith and trust in His abiding presence at every moment of our lives. He invites us to be still and to enter into His silence so that we may come to know His endless love. It is in silence that He transforms us more fully into the likeness of His Son, Jesus Christ. The practice of silence allows us to have a better understanding of ourselves, to become more aware of God's presence throughout our day, to maintain a state of recollection and calm in the midst of stressful situations, and humbly to reach out to others in charity.

*Lesson Eleven will consider the importance of silence in Benedictine spirituality.*

### 1. PRAYER

(This section provides the prayer that is prayed every night at the beginning of Vigils in our monastery along with Old and New Testament passages. There are more passages at the end of this document. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

*Come, O Holy Spirit, replenish the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your divine love.*

*Excite, O Lord, in your Church, the Spirit which our Most Holy Father, St. Benedict served; that filled with the same, we may study to love what he loved and practice what he taught. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*"A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit" (Ps 51:12).*

## 1.1 Old Testament Scripture

“Then the LORD said: ‘Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD; the LORD will pass by.’ There was a strong and violent wind rending the mountains and crushing rocks before the LORD—but the LORD was not in the wind; after the wind, an earthquake—but the LORD was not in the earthquake; after the earthquake, fire—but the LORD was not in the fire; after the fire, a light silent sound” (1 Kgs 19:11-12).

## 1.2 New Testament Scripture

“The report about him spread all the more, and great crowds assembled to listen to him and to be cured of their ailments, but he would withdraw to deserted places to pray” (Lk 5:15-16).

## 1.3 The Rule of St. Benedict

“Monks should diligently cultivate silence at all times, but especially at night” (RB 42:1). Chapter 6 is entitled “Restraint of Speech” and explains the value of silence and keeping guard over one’s mouth. “In a flood of words you will not avoid sin (Prv 10:19)”; “The tongue holds the key to life and death (Prv 18:21)” [RB 6:4-5].

## 2. READINGS

### 2.1 What Silence Is

Silence is defined as the complete absence of noise. “However, silence is not merely the absence of noise but the spirit of loving attention (Spiritus et Sponsa, Pope St. John Paul II, December 4, 2003)” (Raila, p. 33). Silence speaks of a presence; it involves listening and being attentive to another, whether that person is another human being or God Himself. It may also be considered a state of stillness without the exterior noise of words and actions and without the interior noise of thoughts, memories, and concerns. We live in a world filled with noise yet at times punctuated with moments of silence. Though silence may occur because of the absence of other people, silence does not mean the absence of God. In each and every moment, God is present. “Where can I go from your spirit? From your presence, where can I flee?” (Ps 139:7). With faith and trust in Christ, we are invited to enter into the silence that leads us to greater intimacy with God, Who is “the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rv 22:13). The practice of silence is a way for us to become more open to God, to understand ourselves better, and to reach out humbly in greater charity to others.

### 2.2 Silence in Listening and Speaking with God in Scripture

In the Old Testament, the silent presence of God was revealed in Genesis with God's breath bringing forth creation from nothingness. Scripture presents God considering whether He should hide or enter into dialogue with Abraham who persisted with intercessions for Sodom (Gen 18:16-33). The humble and silent prayerful dialogue of Moses with God is revealed with his entrance into the meeting tent to speak with Him (Num 12:2-8). Elijah experienced God as a tiny, whispering sound [This is translated as a light, silent sound in NAB 2011 (cf. 1Kgs 19:11-12)]. The psalms speak of God leading us to still waters (Ps 23:2). With humility, trust, and faith in God's mercy, the psalmist called upon God all the day long to preserve his life (Ps 86:1-17). Isaiah declared that "by waiting and by calm shall you be saved, in quiet and in trust shall be your strength" (Is 30:15). The prophet Zephaniah announced, "Silence in the presence of the Lord GOD! For near is the day of the LORD" (Zep 1:7).

In the New Testament, Mary, the Mother of God, led a life of continual prayer with a silence rooted in humility and obedience to God. "Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart" (Lk 2:19). This type of silence is not passivity without any response but represents eagerness for a genuine encounter. Mary is our perfect model of humility, obedience, silence, and response. It was in silence that Mary answered "yes" to becoming the Mother of God by the work of the Holy Spirit, that she gave birth to Jesus in a stable in Bethlehem, that she stood at the foot of the Cross, and that she waited with the apostles in the Upper Room after the Resurrection and before the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It was in silence that Joseph accepted God's will for him to be Mary's spouse. The Scriptures remain silent during the years of Jesus' maturation when the Holy Family lived in Nazareth. Silence and listening are also

praised by Jesus in the Scripture passage which tells the story of the sisters Martha and Mary; Martha is the one who speaks while Mary chooses to sit silently at Jesus' feet to listen to Him.

### **2.3 The Silence of Jesus**

Before beginning public ministry in Galilee, Jesus entered the silence of the desert for forty days and nights (Mt 4:1-11, Mk 1:12-13). During Jesus' public preaching and healing, Jesus would often go apart from the crowds and the apostles to be with the Father in prayer (Mt 14:23; Mk 1:35; Mk 6:46-47; Lk 4:42; Lk 5:15-16; Lk 6:12; Jn 6:15). Jesus extended the invitation to his disciples, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while" (Mk 6:31). Jesus taught His disciples, "When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret" (Mt 6:6). During the storm at sea, when Jesus called Peter to walk on the water toward Him, Peter became frightened and started to sink. Peter cried out, "Lord, save me!" Jesus replied "Oh you, of little faith, why did you doubt?" After they got into the boat, the wind died down and

they said, "Truly this the Son of God!" (Mt 14:24-33). After his arrest, there were times when Jesus chose to respond with silence rather than with words (cf. Lk 23:9, Mt 27:12-14, Mk 14:61-62). Jesus' humility, obedience, and trust in the Father were revealed supremely in His silence when He was crucified and while He was hanging on the Cross. Three days of silence followed Jesus' last words, "Father into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46). Most importantly, it was out of the sacred silence and emptiness of the tomb that the promise of salvation was realized in Jesus Christ's Resurrection. Fifty days later in the silence of the Upper Room, the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles and upon those gathered with them to give birth to the Church, the Body of Christ (Acts 2:1-4).

#### **2.4 The Value of Silence in the Rule of St. Benedict (see specific references in the Master)**

In his Rule, St. Benedict viewed silence (RB 6), humility (RB 7), and obedience (RB 5) as being necessary elements for living by one's monastic promises. St. Benedict gave silence a high priority when the monks were in sacred places; such silence showed their deep respect for God and provided an environment where other monks could pray without disturbance. "We believe that the divine presence is everywhere," and "we should believe this to be especially true when we celebrate the divine office" (RB 19:1-2). "After the work of God, all should leave in complete silence and with reverence for God, so that a brother who may wish to pray alone will not be disturbed by the insensitivity of another" (RB 52:2-3). This spirit of silence and sacred awe of God should be sought in all circumstances; it should be reflected by the monk's "warmth of love" (RB 66:4) in interactions with others, in the proper handling of things, and in the monk's body posture and demeanor. A spirit of quiet recollection enables the monk to accept a "burdensome task" with "complete gentleness and obedience" (RB 68:1) or to explain patiently "the reasons why he cannot perform the task" (RB 68:2). Outside of the oratory, St. Benedict cautioned that at times even "good words are to be left unsaid out of esteem for silence" (RB 6:2). His Rule emphasized that "monks should diligently cultivate silence at all times, but especially at night" [N.B.: This is called the "grand silence."](RB 42:1). "The Rule of St. Benedict urges monks to be silent in a multitude of situations and to nurture a spirit of inner silence, or recollection, that denotes persistent attentiveness to God's call" (Raila, p. 165).

#### **2.5 Forms of Silence That Are Not Virtues**

Some forms of silence do not have value and are not beneficial to spiritual growth. These include a silence that is rooted in pride that works against unity, a silence that is an expression of repressed anger or inner tension, a silence that inhibits interaction with others because of fear of being criticized or exposed, a silence that asserts one's

will over another to control relationships, a silence that will not take on responsibility, and a silence that resists God. On the other hand, if we selfishly and intentionally avoid moments of genuine silence, we set ourselves on a path that leads to rebellion against God. We will tend to become more insensitive to others. We will encounter restlessness and become vulnerable to self righteous behaviors and murmuring. Though we all may experience intense negative emotions and may be tempted to hold thoughts that tend to suppress the work of the Holy Spirit, St. Benedict calls monks to “dash [evil thoughts] against Christ and disclose them to [their] spiritual father” (RB 4:50). Calling on Christ in moments of need and reaching out to others for spiritual guidance help us gradually to detach ourselves from all that holds us back from opening the doors of our hearts to the great love of God.

## **2.6 The Rejection of Silence in Today’s Culture**

In general, the invitation to practice silence is not well-received in today’s culture, perhaps because communication and continual connectedness with others has been given such high priority. We live in an age of immediate electronic response and social networking. Many people become frightened and insecure if they are not connected to their cell phones or laptops; others cannot drive their cars without playing the radio; some keep their televisions or radios on at all times so that their homes totally lack

silence. Some people carry on constant casual conversations when in the presence of others so that there is no room for silence. Some people prefer always to have some background noise to make them feel better. Others have become addicted to activity so that at all times they must be doing one thing or another and thus find it almost impossible to be still. If we allow exterior or interior noise to take control over us, we become victims of its false security.

## **2.7 Internal and External Noises**

In silence we truly dispose ourselves to God, and He reveals Himself to us. It is important for us to be aware of how external and internal noises harm our spiritual lives so that we take steps to regulate unnecessary noise. Some “outer silence” is needed for us to come to know the “inner silence” of God. Although a quiet atmosphere and solitude are best for our communion with God, simply being physically quiet is not enough; even when alone, we will never entirely rid ourselves of noise. Exterior noise exists in creation, in our homes (especially if we live with others), in our worship, and in our work. Even if a person is in the most secluded part of the forest, the sounds of nature will still be heard; if alone at home, the heating system or the refrigerator will still turn off and on; a neighbor’s dog may bark; an airplane may fly overhead; or the doorbell may announce an unexpected visitor. Interior noise also exists throughout the

day and is even harder to control. It may manifest itself in ambitious thoughts or concerns about personal failure or success, in a resurgence of memories that affect the present moment, in imaginations, or in distractions and temptations that may lead us to turn our focus away from God. When noise and activity seem impossible to eliminate, it is good to remind ourselves that patient perseverance and continual refocusing on God can be as pleasing to God, or even more pleasing to God, than times of quiet uninterrupted prayer. Just as Jesus Christ “rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Quiet! Be still!’” (Mk 4:39), so can He enter our hearts and calm the noise within us so that we may experience His peace despite adverse circumstances.

## **2.8 The Challenge of Creating Silence**

Creating a regular daily pattern for quiet listening in our often busy, demanding, noisy, and chaotic world may pose a challenge. We may be tempted to set aside opportunities for silent prayer when we are involved in worthy charitable works or in other legitimate endeavors that fill our day with work and noise. At times when we enter into silence, we may feel that God has abandoned us as Job felt after suffering enormous losses. However, our observation that God is being silent does not mean that He is absent and far from us. God knows our needs at all times and is especially present in moments of stress, darkness, pain, loneliness, and rejection. The silence of Christ during His Passion, Death, and Resurrection give us absolute assurance of God’s presence and power to act and to save even when we cannot observe anything good happening.

## **2.9 Sacred Silence as a Priority**

Nothing should take priority over our need for setting aside some time for prayerful sacred silence that leads us to God, Who is the source of all grace and wisdom. In faith and trust we can humbly and obediently present ourselves before God “just as we are” with all our many thoughts and concerns. If we set aside time for silence and remain in silent attentiveness to God’s presence during our day, God will gradually and silently transform us to be more Christ-like through the work of the Holy Spirit. We will also grow in patient endurance, so that when distractions of one kind or another threaten our inner peace, we may remain secure in Christ. Humility, obedience, docility, listening, and a sense of awe open our hearts to God and in turn open our hearts in charity to others. We come to understand better when we should speak and when we should remain silent. His abiding presence in our hearts allows us to become better witnesses to Christ in the world.

## **2.10 “A Time to Be Silent, and a Time to Speak” (Eccl 3:7)**

“There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens. A time to be silent, and a time to speak” (Eccl 3:1,7). Silence, listening, and speaking are intimately connected. Listening is attentiveness that goes beyond mere hearing and that involves true receptivity to another. Speaking and listening relate directly to our prayer lives and also affect our interactions with one another. If we are the only ones doing the talking, we cannot hear the other person and receive what he or she is saying to us. Chapter Six of the Rule calls for prudent restraint of speech and highlights the value of “keeping guard over one’s mouth” since “in a flood of words you will not avoid sin” [Prv 10:19] as “the tongue holds the key to life and death” [Prv 18:21] (RB 6:4-5). Silence can protect us against the temptations to gossip, to betray secrets, and to present ourselves under false pretenses. A spirit of recollection can strengthen us so that we may encounter the truth about ourselves and restrain ourselves from expressing hostility in stressful situations. Silence guards us against making judgments and comparisons that lead to false conclusions; with silence we can overcome superficiality and self centeredness.

### **2.11 Silence and Christ-like Communication**

Silence can also enrich us with a more proper manner of speaking and a better discernment as to what and when to speak. Scripture speaks of the many times when Jesus spoke with great authority (cf. Mt 4:10, Mk 4:39) and also of the times when He remained silent (cf. Mt 27:12-14, Acts 8:32 [Is 53:7]). Christ-like conversation is always rooted in the truth abiding in the heart. Whether the conversation is casual or of great importance, respectful and open communication becomes a gift to the other person and unites both in Christ. It recognizes the dignity of the person and does not become assertive with demands of compliance. Instead, there is a balance so that the speaker does not dominate, and the listener is able to receive and respond in freedom. The practice of silence may allow us to mature spiritually so that we may truly hear, respect, and appreciate even what is not spoken. Only through humility are we able to enter into a silence that brings us to this greater recollection.

### **2.12 Communal Worship**

When we celebrate the Life, Passion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ in liturgical worship, the liturgy includes periods of speaking and of listening; there are times to join together in community prayer and to greet one another in peace and times to pray in the silence of our hearts. The most powerful sacred silence occurs at the consecration when the bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ by the words and actions of the priest. In the silence of that sacred moment, God becomes truly present before us, and we prepare to receive Him in the silence of our hearts. We are able to nurture silent reverence in ourselves and in our community by using bodily

postures that help our receptivity in listening to God's word; by using deliberate and heart-felt bows and gestures, we enable our bodies to give honor to God and to lead us and others to deeper prayer. We may be able to increase our silent attentiveness by arriving earlier and staying later. As we join the community and prepare to leave, we should also respect the silence of others who wish to remain in prayer. Silent adoration of the exposed Blessed Sacrament can be an especially grace-filled way to nurture our relationship with Christ. As we return to the demands of our daily life, the habits that we have nurtured during liturgy strengthen us and help us to become a living sacrifice of praise (cf. Rom 12:1).

### **2.13 Silence as a Welcome to Christ**

St. Benedict viewed silence as a positive challenge. In silence, humility, and obedience we may faithfully and courageously open our hearts to God to experience *conversatio morum* (conversion of heart). We can continue to cherish the sacred moments of silence without letting them be wasted or lost. We can carry the presence of God in the midst of our work and in personal interactions with others throughout the day. The practice of silence strengthens us in grace so that we may better obey the will of God and grow in purity of heart, integrity, and holiness. With the regular practice of silence, we become more aware of God's presence in every moment and are better able to maintain a recollected state in the midst of varying situations. As silence draws us closer to the heart of God, we will be guided toward making prudent decisions in regard to balancing the demands of our lives and toward responding with charitable outreach to others in freedom and with calmness. Silent reverence is our loving response to God, Who loved us first beyond measure. Practicing silence opens our hearts to the voice of God. Practicing silence prepares us to welcome the coming of Christ here and now, at the hour of our death, and at the Last Judgment.

## **3. SUMMARY**

### **3.1 What Silence Is**

- A. Silence is not only the complete absence of noise but also a spirit of loving attention (Spiritus et Sponsa, Pope St. John Paul II, December 4, 2003).
  - 1. It involves listening and being attentive.
  - 2. It is stillness with a minimum of exterior and interior noises.
- B. Our world is filled with noise, but our lives can be punctuated with moments of silence.
- C. When God seems to be silent, it does not mean that He is absent; He is present at each and every moment (Ps 139:7, Rv 22:13).

D. The practice of silence has benefits:

1. We become more open to God.
2. We come to a better understanding of ourselves.
3. We are strengthened to reach out humbly to others in charity.

3.2 Silence in Listening and Speaking with God in Scripture

A. The Old Testament speaks of silence in relation to God and also of the human response.

1. Abraham interceded for Sodom (Gen 18:16-23).
2. Moses entered the silence of the meeting tent (Num 12:2-8).
3. Elijah experienced God as a tiny, whispering sound [This is translated as a light, silent sound in NAB 2011 (cf. 1Kgs 19:11-12)].
4. The psalms speak of God as leading us to still waters (Ps 23:2).
5. With humility, trust, and faith in God's mercy, the psalmist calls upon God (Ps 86:1-17).
6. Isaiah declared that "by waiting and by calm shall you be saved, in quiet and in trust shall be your strength" (Is 30:15).
7. Zephaniah announced, "Silence in the presence of the Lord GOD! For near is the day of the LORD" (Zep 1:7).

B. The New Testament speaks of silence in relation to God and also of the human response.

1. Mary led a life of continual prayer rooted in humility and obedience to God and accepted the invitation to become the Mother of God.
2. Jesus was born in the silence of a stable in Bethlehem.
3. Mary and others waited in silence at the foot of the Cross.
4. Mary and the apostles waited in the Upper Room after the Resurrection and before the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
5. St. Joseph remained silent and accepted Mary as his spouse.
6. Scripture is silent in regard to Jesus' childhood and maturation in Nazareth.
7. Jesus praises Mary, the sister of Martha, who chose to sit at the feet of Jesus and to listen in silence.

3.3 The Silence of Jesus

## Lesson 11: Invitation to Silence

- A. Before beginning public ministry, Jesus entered the silence of the desert (Mt 4:1-11, Mk 1:12-13).
- B. During Jesus' public preaching and healing, He would often go apart from the crowds to be with the Father in prayer (Mt 14:23; Mt 14:31,23; Mk 1:35; Mk 6:46-47; Lk 4:42; Lk 5:15-16; Lk 6:12; Jn 6:15).
- C. Jesus extended the invitation to his disciples, "Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while" (Mk 6:31).
- D. Jesus taught His disciples, "When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret" (Mt 6:6).
- E. Jesus called to Peter to walk on the water toward Him; when Peter cried, "Lord, save me!" Jesus came to him and silenced the storm (Mt 14:24-33).
- F. After His arrest, there were times when Jesus chose silence rather than speech as his response (cf. Lk 23:9, Mt 27:12-14, Mk 14:61-62).
- G. Jesus' humility, obedience, and trust in the Father were revealed supremely in His silence when He was crucified and while He was hanging on the Cross.
- H. Three days of silence followed Jesus' last words, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit" (Lk 23:46).
- I. Most importantly, it was out of the sacred silence and emptiness of the tomb that the promise of salvation was realized in Jesus Christ's Resurrection.
- J. Fifty days later in the silence of the Upper Room, the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles and upon those gathered with them to give birth to the Church, the Body of Christ (Acts 2:1-4).

### 3.4 The Value of Silence in the Rule of St. Benedict (see specific references in the Master)

- A. St. Benedict viewed silence (RB 6), humility (RB 7), and obedience (RB 5) as being necessary elements for living by one's monastic promises.
- B. St. Benedict gave silence a very high priority when the monks were in sacred places.
- C. Silence shows deep reverence for God; it helps us to recognize that God is always present.
- D. Silence nurtures a "warmth of love" and greater care for others in the community.
- E. Silence is reflected in the proper handling of things and in respectful bodily posture and demeanor.

- F. A spirit of quiet recollection enables the monk to accept a “burdensome task” with “complete gentleness and obedience” (RB 68:1) or to explain patiently “the reasons why he cannot perform the task” (RB 68:2).
- G. At times even “good words are to be left unsaid out of esteem for silence” (RB 6:2).
- H. The Rule emphasizes that “monks should diligently cultivate silence at all times, but especially at night” (RB 42:1).
- I. “The Rule of St. Benedict urges monks to be silent in a multitude of situations and to nurture a spirit of inner silence, or recollection, that denotes persistent attentiveness to God’s call” (Raila, p. 165).

### 3.5 Forms of Silence That Are Not Virtues

- A. Silence can be rooted in pride and thus works against unity.
- B. Silence can be an expression of repressed anger or inner tension.
- C. Silence can prevent interaction with others because of fear of being criticized or exposed.
- D. Silence can be used to assert one’s will over another to control relationships.
- E. Silence can be used to avoid taking on responsibility.
- F. Silence can be misused in resistance to God.

### 3.6 The Rejection of Silence in Today’s Culture

- A. Communication and continual connectedness with others has been given such high priority that the need for silence is often ignored.
- B. We live in an age of immediate electronic response and social networking.
- C. Many people become frightened and insecure if they are not connected to their cell phones or laptops; others cannot drive their cars without playing the radio.
- D. Some people keep their televisions or radios on at all times as an escape from silence.
- E. Some people carry on constant casual conversations in dealing with others so that there is no room for silence.
- F. Some people prefer always to have some background noise to make them feel better.
- G. Others have become so addicted to activity that at all times they must be doing one thing or another, without any desire to become still.

- H. If we allow exterior or interior noise to take control over us, we become victims of its false security.
- I. A selfish and intentional avoidance of silence sets us on a path that leads to rebellion against God, self-righteous behaviors, murmuring, and insensitivity to others.

### 3.7 Internal and External Noises

- A. It is important for us to be aware of how external and internal noises endanger our spiritual lives.
- B. We need to take steps to regulate unnecessary noise.
- C. Simply being physically quiet is not enough.
- D. Exterior noise exists in creation, in our homes (especially if we live with others), and in our places of worship and work.
- E. Interior noise manifests itself in thoughts or concerns, in memories that affect the present moment, in imaginations, or in distractions and temptations.
- F. St. Benedict calls monks to “dash [evil thoughts] against Christ and disclose them to [their] spiritual father” (RB 4:50).
- G. We will never entirely rid ourselves of noise.
  - 1. We are called to return our focus on God, no matter how many times!
  - 2. Patient perseverance and continual re-focusing on God can be as pleasing to God, or even more pleasing to God, than the experience of quiet, uninterrupted prayer.
  - 3. Just as Jesus Christ “rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Quiet! Be still!’” (Mk 4:39), so can He enter our hearts and calm the noise within us so that we may experience His peace.

### 3.8 The Challenge of Creating Silence

- A. We live in a busy, chaotic, and noisy world.
- B. Worthy charitable works and other legitimate endeavors can fill our day with work and noise.
- C. When practicing silence, we may feel that God has abandoned us as Job felt after suffering enormous losses.
- D. The impression that God is silent does not mean that He is absent and far from us.

1. God is especially present in moments of stress, darkness, pain, loneliness, and rejection.
2. The silence of Christ during His Passion, Death, and Resurrection gives us absolute assurance of God's presence and power to act and to save amid our dark moments.

### 3.9 Sacred Silence as a Priority

- A. Nothing should interfere with our regular practice of prayerful sacred silence.
- B. Sacred silence leads us to God, Who is the source of all grace and wisdom.
- C. We can humbly and obediently present ourselves before God "just as we are."
- D. God gently and silently transforms us to be more Christ-like through the work of the Holy Spirit.
- E. Through silent prayer we grow in patient endurance, so that when distractions of one kind or another threaten our inner peace, we may remain secure in Christ.
- F. Humility, obedience, docility, listening, and a sense of awe open our hearts to God and also open our hearts in charity to others.
- G. We come to understand better when we should speak and when we should remain silent.
- H. We become better witnesses to Christ in the world.

### 3.10 "A Time to Be Silent, and a Time to Speak" (Eccl 3:7)

- A. Silence, listening, and speaking are intimately connected.
- B. Speaking and listening relate directly to our prayer lives and also affect our interactions with one another.
- C. Chapter Six of the Rule calls for prudent restraint of speech and highlights the value of "keeping guard over one's mouth" since "in a flood of words you will not avoid sin" [Prv 10:19] as "the tongue holds the key to life and death" [Prv 18:21] (RB 6:4-5).
- D. Silence can protect us against the temptations to gossip, to betray secrets, and to present ourselves under false pretenses.
- E. A spirit of recollection can strengthen us so that we may acknowledge the truth about ourselves and thus restrain ourselves from expressing hostility in stressful situations.
- F. Silence guards us against making judgments and comparisons that lead to false conclusions.

G. Silence leads us away from superficiality and self-centeredness.

### 3.11 Silence and Christ-like Communication

- A. Jesus spoke with great authority (cf. Mt 4:10, Mk 4:39) and at other times remained silent (cf. Mt 27:12-14, Acts 8:32 [Is 53:7]).
- B. Christ-like conversation is always rooted in the truth of the heart.
- C. Christian communication is a gift to the other person and unites both parties in Christ.
- D. It recognizes the dignity of the person and does not become assertive with demands of compliance.
- E. In good conversation balance exists so that the speaker does not dominate and the listener is able to receive and to respond in freedom.
- F. We can learn to hear, respect, and appreciate even what is not spoken.
- G. Humility brings us to a greater recollection.

### 3.12 Communal Worship

- A. It includes periods of speaking and listening.
- B. The consecration of the bread and the wine is a moment of sacred silence.
- C. Before receiving communion, we should silently prepare ourselves to receive the Lord.
- D. We can nurture silent reverence in ourselves and in our community by using bodily postures that help our receptivity to God's word.
- E. Deliberate and heart-felt bows and gestures enable our bodies to give honor to God and lead us and others to deeper prayer.
- F. We may be able to increase our silent attentiveness by arriving earlier and staying later.
- G. We should also respect the silence of others who wish to remain in prayer.
- H. Silent adoration of the exposed Blessed Sacrament can be an especially grace-filled way to nurture our relationship with Christ.
- I. Habits that we have nurtured during liturgy strengthen us and help us to become a living sacrifice of praise (cf. Rom 12:1).

### 3.13 Silence as a Welcome to Christ

- A. St. Benedict viewed silence as a positive challenge that leads to conversion of heart.

- B. We should not waste opportunities for cherished moments of sacred silence.
- C. We can carry the presence of God in the midst of our work and in personal interactions with others throughout the day.
- D. Silence allows us better to obey the will of God and to grow in purity of heart, integrity, and holiness.
- E. The regular practice of silence allows us to become more aware of God's presence in every moment.
- F. We are better able to maintain a recollected state in the midst of varying situations.
- G. We are guided toward making prudent decisions in regard to balancing the demands of our lives and toward responding with charitable outreach to others in freedom and with calmness.
- H. Silent reverence is our loving response to God Who loved us first beyond measure.
- I. Practicing silence opens our hearts to the voice of God.
- J. Practicing silence prepares us to welcome the coming of Christ here and now, at the hour of our death, and at the Last Judgment.

#### **4. SUPPLEMENTARY READING**

##### **4.1 Silence and Humility**

Silence (RB 6) and humility (RB 7), along with obedience (RB 5), constitute another triad of values which St. Benedict places at the heart of his Rule. The practice of silence and humility gives added depth to one's living of the promises.

Amidst a noisy and unfocused world, Oblates nurture both external and internal silence as a necessary condition for hearing the call of God and responding to it. Outward silence is not necessarily a virtue in itself, but some external stillness is required if one's inner spirit is to be recollected. There is a good kind of silence that unites people in charity, and there is a bad kind of silence that can be a way of dividing one person from another. A silent heart is ready to listen reverently to others since it is so often through other people that God speaks. The silence valued by Oblates provides a witness to a world which often avoids coming to grips with itself and its problems by promoting an atmosphere of noise and frenetic activity.

Humility involves both an honest admission of one's own limitations, weaknesses, and sinfulness and a reverent mindfulness of God's redeeming presence in Jesus Christ. If

we are to grow in holiness, we must be aware both of how far we are from the goal and of how powerful is God's grace to lead us to the fullness of life, in His way and in His time. Humility is neither self-abasement nor a denial of one's gifts. It rather involves a continual refocus from self to Christ and an acceptance of oneself as one is and of God as He is -- One ever ready to transform us, redeem us, and surprise us in His all-embracing love.

#### **4.1 Holy Leisure**

Benedictine spirituality sets out to develop people who reflect on what they are doing and who see their world through the eyes of the Gospel. Play and rest are essential to healthy spiritual life. Play consists of activities done for no purpose at all except the release and recapture of energy. The practice of silence and adherence to lectio and other forms of prayer require a somewhat leisurely attitude towards life that rejects the view that everything depends on human achievement and so must be rigorously planned and controlled. Holy leisure is the foundation of contemplation, which is the pursuit of meaning, the finding of God's will everywhere, and the ability to see the world around us as God sees it. The practice of holy leisure can stretch the soul to regard all life as sacred, and not merely as utilitarian.

### **5. SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES**

#### **Books**

Fr. Anselm Grün, O.S.B. *The Challenge of Silence*. (Schuyler Spiritual Series Vol. 11), BMH Publications, 1993.

Paul Tournier. *A Listening Ear*. Augsburg Publishing House, 1987.

Abbess Maria-Thomas Beil, O.S.B. *Silence and Hospitality*. Abbey of St. Walburga, Virginia Dale, CO, 1995.

Fr. R. Ambrose Wathen, O.S.B. *Silence* (Cistercian Studies Series: No.22), Cistercian Publications, 1973.

Fr. Cyprian Smith, O.S.B. *The Path of Life: Benedictine Spirituality for Monks and Lay People (Chapter 5)*. Ampleforth Abbey Press, 2004.

Fr. Donald S. Raila, O.S.B. *Lessons from Saint Benedict: Finding Joy in Daily Life, (Chapters 11, 22, 25)*. Sacred Winds Press, 2011 [also, A Study Guide to... (2013)].

Fr. Michael Casey, O.C.S.O. *Seventy-Four Tools for Good Living: Reflections on the Fourth Chapter of Benedict's Rule*. Liturgical Press. 2014.

Cardinal Robert Sarah. *The Power of Silence: Against the Dictatorship of Noise*, translated by Michael J. Miller. Ignatius Press, 2017.

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, #2628, #2709-2719), United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1994.

## **YouTube**

Silence with Cardinal Robert Sarah <https://youtu.be/eVnyT1nH8TQ>

Bishop Richard J. Malone talks about the importance of silence in our lives and refers to the book "La Force Du Silence" by Cardinal Robert Sarah. [https://youtu.be/Mxli\\_pKaUIQ](https://youtu.be/Mxli_pKaUIQ)

Pope Francis invites everyone to 5 minutes of silence today to discover God  
<https://youtu.be/db6dRgRLZ38>

"Entering Silence that Changes Me" by Br. Leven Harton, OSB, Conference #4 of Holy Week. St. Benedict's Abbey Vocations Director.

<https://www.youtube.com/live/jR21juDuV5o?feature=share>

Fr. Mark Goring - establish grand silence <https://youtu.be/M7Qf4ImK-Us>

## **6. REFLECTION QUESTIONS**

This [link](#) provides an opportunity to share your responses to a few questions after you have read, reflected on and prayed over a lesson's topic. (It is not required to provide answers to the questions but Oblate Novices are encouraged to do so.)

### **Oblates & Genuine Conversion**

This section contains two factual questions; all answers are found in that lesson or pertain to it.

- 1. Why is Christian silence so important? Give some examples from the Rule as to how St. Benedict sought to preserve reverence and silence in the oratory, in the work of the monk, and in community interactions.**
- 2. Exterior and interior noises interfere with silence. Give examples of each and explain what possibly could be done to maintain the practice of silence better during prayer times and throughout the day.**

### **Personal Conversion of Life**

This section contains your choice of one reflection question. Please reply to one of the following three questions (though you are welcome to reply to more than one, if you wish):

3. **Give some examples of silence in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Which of these passages hold the greatest meaning for you? Why?**
4. **Do you see ways that would nurture a greater spirit of silence in your home, at work, and during social interactions? What are they? What benefits could come?**
5. **Consider and share some types of behavior that could nurture a greater spirit of humility, reverence, and openness to God before and during your participation at a worship service.**

## **APPENDIX 11 – Additional Optional References for Lesson 11**

### **Full Texts of Scripture and Rule Verses**

(This section provides more passages from the Old and New Testament and the Holy Rule. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

#### **Old Testament Scripture**

**Gen 32:25** “Jacob was left there alone. Then a man wrestled with him until the break of dawn.”

**Ps 8:2-3** “O LORD, our Lord, how awesome is your name through all the earth! I will sing of your majesty above the heavens with the mouths of babes and infants. You have established a bulwark against your foes, to silence enemy and avenger.”

**Ps 23:2** “In green pastures he makes me lie down; to still waters he leads me.”

**Ps 39:2** “I said, ‘I will watch my ways, lest I sin with my tongue; I will keep a muzzle on my mouth.’”

**Ps 46:11** “Be still and know that I am God!”

**Ps 50:3; 19-21** “Our God comes and will not be silent! You give your mouth free rein for evil; you yoke your tongue to deceit. You sit and speak against your brother, slandering your mother’s son. When you do these things should I be silent? Do you think that I am like you? I accuse you, I lay out the matter before your eyes.”

**Ps 131:2** “Rather, I have stilled my soul, like a weaned child to its mother, weaned is my soul.”

**Ps 141:3** “Set a guard, LORD, before my mouth, keep watch over the door of my lips.”

**Prv 17:27-28** “Those who spare their words are truly knowledgeable, and those who are discreet are intelligent. Even fools, keeping silent, are considered wise; if they keep their lips closed, intelligent.”

**Ecc 3:1,7** “There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens.” “...a time to be silent, and a time to speak.”

**Is 30:15** “By waiting and by calm you shall be saved, in quiet and in trust shall be your strength.”

**Is 42:1-2** “Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased. Upon him I have put my spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry out, nor shout, nor make his voice heard in the street.”

**Is 53:7** “Though harshly treated, he submitted and did not open his mouth; like a lamb led to slaughter or a sheep silent before shearers, he did not open his mouth.”

**Is 62:1** “For Zion’s sake I will not be silent, for Jerusalem’s sake I will not keep still, until her vindication shines forth like the dawn and her salvation like a burning torch.”

**Is 62:6** “Upon your walls, Jerusalem, I have stationed sentinels; by day and by night, they shall never be silent.”

**Lam 3:27-28** “It is good for a person, when young, to bear the yoke, to sit alone and in silence, when its weight lies heavy.”

**Hb 2:20** “But the LORD is in his holy temple; silence before him, all the earth!”

**Zep 1:7** “Silence in the presence of the Lord GOD! For near is the day of the LORD, Yes, the LORD has prepared a sacrifice, he has consecrated his guests.”

**Zec 2:17** “Silence, all people, in the presence of the LORD, who stirs forth from his holy dwelling.”

### **New Testament Scripture**

**Mt 6:6** “But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret.”

**Mt 14:13** “When Jesus heard of it, he withdrew in a boat to a deserted place by himself.”

**Mt 14:23** “After doing so, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When it was evening he was there alone.”

**Mt 26:40** “When he returned to his disciples he found them asleep. He said to Peter, ‘So you could not keep watch with me for one hour?’”

**Mt 27:12-14** “And when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he made no answer. Then Pilate said to him, ‘Do you not hear how many things they are testifying against you?’ But he did not answer him one word, so that the governor was greatly amazed.”

**Mk 1:12-13** “At once the Spirit drove him out into the desert, and he remained in the desert for forty days, tempted by Satan.”

**Mk 1:35** “Rising very early before dawn, he left and went off to a deserted place, where he prayed.”

**Mk 4:39** “He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Quiet! Be still!’ The wind ceased and there was great calm.”

**Mk 6:31** “He said to them, ‘Come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while.’”

**Mk 14:61-62** “But he was silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him and said to him, ‘Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?’ Then Jesus answered, ‘I am.’”

**Mk 15:5** “Jesus gave him no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.”

**Lk 4:42** “At daybreak, Jesus left and went to a deserted place.”

**Lk 6:12** “In those days he departed to the mountain to pray, and he spent the night in prayer to God.”

**Lk 23:8-9** “Herod was very glad to see Jesus; he had been wanting to see him for a long time, for he had heard about him and had been hoping to see him perform some sign. He questioned him at length, but he gave him no answer.”

**Jn 6:15** “Since Jesus knew that they were going to come and carry him off to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain alone.”

**Acts 2:1-4** “When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim.”

**Acts 8:32** “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opened not his mouth.”

**Jas 3:4-5** “It is the same with ships: even though they are so large and driven by fierce winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot’s inclination wishes. In the same way the tongue is a small member and yet has great pretensions. Consider how small a fire can set a huge forest ablaze.”

**Rv 8:1-2** “When he broke open the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw that the seven angels who stood before God were given seven trumpets.”

### **The Rule of St. Benedict**

**RB 3:4** “The brothers, for their part, are to express their opinions with all humility, and not presume to defend their own views obstinately.”

**RB 4:74** “And finally, never lose hope in God’s mercy.”

**RB 5:15** “For the obedience shown to superiors is given to God, as he himself said: “Whoever listens to you, listens to me (Lk 10:16).”

**RB 6:2** “Here the Prophet indicates that there are times when good words are to be left unsaid out of esteem for silence (Ps 39:2-3).”

**RB 6:6** “Speaking and teaching are the master’s task; the disciple is to be silent and listen.”

**RB 6:7** “Therefore any requests to a superior should be made with all humility and respectful submission.”

**RB 7** In this chapter St. Benedict’s describes the necessary twelve steps of humility in practicing silence.

**RB 9:7** “As soon as the cantor begins to sing ‘Glory be to the Father,’ let all the monks rise from their seats in honor and reverence for the Holy Trinity.”

**RB 11:9** “...he reads from the Gospels while all the monks stand with respect and awe.”

**RB 19:1-2** “We believe that the divine presence is everywhere.”

**RB 19:7** This verse explains that the psalms should be sung “in such a way that our minds are in harmony with our voices.”

**RB 22:6** This verse explains that the monks are to always “be ready to arise without delay to arrive at the Work of God.”

**RB 20:2** This verse explains that the monks are to lay their “petitions before the Lord God of all things with the utmost humility and sincere devotion.”

**RB 25** This chapter explains that exclusion and silence will be the punishment for a “brother guilty of a serious fault” (vs.1). “He will work alone at the tasks assigned to him...” (vs.3). “Let him take his food alone...”(vs.5).

**RB 38:5-7** “Let there be complete silence. No whispering, no speaking – only the reader’s voice should be heard there. The brothers should serve by turn serve one another’s needs as they eat and drink, so that no one need ask for anything. If, however, anything is required, it should be requested by an audible signal of some kind rather than by speech.”

**RB 42:1** “Monks should diligently cultivate silence at all times, but especially at night.”

**RB 47:3-4** “No one should presume to read or sing unless he is able to benefit the hearers; let this be done with humility, seriousness and reverence, and at the abbot’s bidding.”

**RB 48:5** “But after Sext and their meal, they may rest on their beds in complete silence; should a brother wish to read privately, let him do so, but without disturbing the others.”

**RB 49:7** “In other words, let each one deny himself some food, drink, sleep, needless talking and idle jesting, and look forward to holy Easter with joy and spiritual longing.”

**RB 52:2-3** “After the Work of God, all should leave in complete silence and with reverence for God, so that a brother who may wish to pray alone will not be disturbed by the insensitivity of another.”

**RB 61:4** This verse explains that a visiting monk “may, indeed, with all humility and love make some reasonable criticisms or observations, which the abbot should prudently consider.”

**RB 66:4** This chapter explains how the porter of the monastery should give prompt answer with the warmth of love.

**RB 67:5** “No one should presume to relate to anyone else what he saw or heard outside the monastery, because that causes the greatest harm.”

**RB 68:1-2** If a burdensome task is assigned, the monk may patiently explain “to his superior the reasons why he cannot perform the task.”

## Lesson 12: Poverty & Simplicity of Life

### INTRODUCTION

*“For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9).*

You are now receiving the last of the twelve Benedictine spirituality lessons in the Westminster Abbey Oblate Formation Program. In many ways, this lesson is very similar to Lesson One: On Holiness and Pursuing Benedictine Spirituality. In our call to holiness we are to listen carefully to God with the “ear of our heart” (RB Prol: 1) and to put into practice the teachings of Christ. Most importantly we are to “love the Lord [our] God with all [our] heart, with all [our] soul, with all [our] mind, and with all [our] strength” and to “love [our] neighbor as [ourselves]” (Mk 12:28-34 [Dt 6:4-9, Mt 22:36-40, Lk 10:27]). The other ten lessons provided specific insights into Benedictine spirituality. We hope that this formation program has been a source of blessing for you in your daily work and prayer.

If you have not already applied for final Oblation and think that you are ready, please Form 1 available [here](#).

May you continue to call upon God for His help and to spend time in silent listening to Him. May you regularly set aside time to pray Liturgy of the Hours and prayerfully to read Scripture and the Rule. May you continue to pray for and to remain in contact with the Benedictine community of monks and affiliated Oblates of Westminster Abbey. Be assured of their prayers for you! May you find Christ’s peace in your life with a right balance and a healthy rhythm of prayer and work. May you continue to enrich your life with spiritual goods for the greater glory of God!

With an open heart and steadfast love, may your love for Christ deepen and mature so that you bear much fruit and enter into everlasting life!

**Lesson Twelve** *will consider simplicity and poverty in Benedictine spirituality.*

### 1. PRAYER

(This section provides the prayer that is prayed every night at the beginning of Vigils in our monastery along with Old and New Testament passages. There are more passages at the end of this document. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

*Come, O Holy Spirit, replenish the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your divine love.*

*Excite, O Lord, in your Church, the Spirit which our Most Holy Father, St. Benedict served; that filled with the same, we may study to love what he loved and practice what he taught. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

*“A clean heart create for me, God; renew within me a steadfast spirit” (Ps 51:12).*

### **1.1 Old Testament Scripture**

“All you who are thirsty, come to the water! You who have no money, come, buy grain and eat; Come, buy grain without money, wine and milk without cost! Why spend your money for what is not bread; your wages for what does not satisfy? Only listen to me, and you shall eat well, you shall delight in rich fare. Pay attention and come to me; listen, that you may have life” (Is 55:1-3).

### **1.2 New Testament Scripture**

“Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:6-11).

### **1.3 The Rule of St. Benedict**

“Let them prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to everlasting life.” [RB 72:11-12]

## **2. READINGS**

*“Not to us, Lord, not to us give the glory, but to your name alone” (Ps 115:1 [RB Prol:30]).*

### **2.1 Which Is the First of All the Commandments?**

“One of the scribes came to Jesus and asked him, ‘Which is the first of all the commandments?’ Jesus replied, ‘The first is this: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.’ The scribe

said to him, ‘Well said, teacher. You are right in saying, He is One and there is no other than he. And to love him with all your heart, with all your understanding, with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.’ And when Jesus saw that he answered with understanding, he said to him, ‘You are not far from the Kingdom of God’” (Mk 12:28-34 [Dt 6:4-9, Mt 22:36-40, Lk 10:27]).

## **2.2 What Monastic Poverty and Simplicity of Life Can Teach Us**

Monastic poverty and simplicity of life call us to relinquish individual control, to reject unnecessary personal ownership of material things, and to let go of self-will so that we may freely focus our lives on God and compassionately care for the needs of others. By placing our reliance on God and trusting in His abiding care, we are able to let go of selfish motivations tied to personal achievement and success. Self-centeredness and aggressive competition lead us to sin, turn us away from God, and isolate us from one another. We are called to detach ourselves from our self-centered desires, impulses, and disordered behaviors; in doing so, we find freedom in Christ to strive to place God first at all times. When we choose to follow Christ in poverty and simplicity of life, we unite ourselves with Christ and with others; we are led on the path toward eternal life.

A person, community, or family dedicated to living a life of poverty and simplicity becomes stronger in love for God and in mutual interdependence in the common sharing of goods and services. The dignity of each person is valued and recognized; self-will is set aside in order to follow the will of God more closely and to provide for the greater good of the other. The truth of our baptism in Christ (and of consecration for vowed religious) rests in the call to be poor as Christ was poor and to be stripped especially of self-will. The Rule of St. Benedict calls us to listen to the voice of the Lord calling to us, “Is there anyone here who yearns for life and desires to see good days?” (RB Prol: 15 [Ps 34:13]). We are called to know “the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for [our] sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty [we] might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). In dying to ourselves and in following Him by living a life of poverty and simplicity we are able to praise God in saying, “Not to us, Lord, not to us give the glory, but to your name alone” (Ps 115:1).

## **2.3 Why Dispossession Is Difficult for Us**

Dispossession is especially difficult for us because we live in a world that views wealth as a cultural sign of importance. The world perceives material wealth as adding to the value of the person; wealth brings greater prestige along with praise for personal success. Worldly achievement is applauded and rewarded in ways that often lead to a building up of pride - as if WE have accomplished the work ALONE without any help

from God. Rather than leading us to less personal consumption, greater wealth often leads to greater personal consumption; it seems that we can never have enough. Temptations exist to focus more of our attention and energy on attaining the next greater level of status and prominence. When we focus our attention on the acquisition of the things of the world, rather than thanking God and acknowledging that He alone is the source of our gifts and talents and of all that we have, we damage our relationship with God and dishonor the dignity and value of the human person.

Many advertisements attempt to create a desire for consumer goods that never answer our true needs; they can never satisfy our inner emptiness. The danger exists of being caught up in buying particular brands of things and in buying more and more of them, so that we leave little time and energy to consider God and the true meaning of our life. Caught up in our fast-paced economic climate, our vision is often impaired; we may lack the discipline to practice self-denial and so may act on impulse. We may find ourselves lacking the clear vision to see that a lifestyle of poverty and simplicity leads us to God and to greater love of one another. The challenge is a difficult one that calls for us to change our attitude toward the priority of material goods in this world and to give the greatest significance to the everlasting spiritual goods of God. In our fast-paced materialistic world, we sometimes accumulate possessions mindlessly, and preoccupation with these can impede our following of Christ. When Jesus Christ called his disciples, He asked them to leave everything behind and to follow Him (cf. Mt 4:18-22, Mk 1:16-20, Lk 5:11). He said, “In the same way, every one of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:33).

#### **2.4 Value of Material Poverty**

Historically, the fervor and virtue of a monastic community have been linked with its practice of poverty. When possessions are set aside, the value of the human person is highlighted. “If we were really indifferent to material wealth, then we would treat everyone like millionaires” (Strangers to the City, p. 81). Simplicity of life also helps us not to worry so much about material things and their maintenance and replacement; we are freed to focus our desires on Christ and God’s will for us. Of course, for most of us this does not mean that we literally give up all our possessions, but we should surrender our attachment to them. At times we may find ourselves attached to opinions, routines, and schedules; these attachments need to be set aside if we discover that they hinder us from following God’s will. With our focus on Christ, we are able to detach ourselves from what is unnecessary and attach ourselves to what is necessary, so that we are able to recognize the dignity of each person; “Christ is to be adored because He is indeed welcomed in them” (RB 53:7).

The Rule of St. Benedict offers much guidance in ordering one's life in a balance that is in accord with Christian poverty and simplicity of life. Chapter 4 ("The Tools for Good Works") calls us to reject pride, to renounce ourselves so that we may follow Christ, to discipline ourselves, to love fasting, and to respond to the needs of the poor. We are to "place [our] hope in God alone" (RB 4:41). Chapter 5 ("Obedience") speaks of love impelling us to take the narrow road that leads to eternal life; we are to set aside our whims, appetites, and personal judgments in favor of a trusted authority (which for the monk would be his abbot). Furthermore, without an order from the abbot, no monk should presume to call anything his own because all things are held in common possession to serve the needs of the community (RB 33 [Acts 4:32]). Distribution of goods should not be based on favoritism but rather on consideration for the weaknesses of the truly needy. "Whoever needs less should thank God and not be distressed, but whoever needs more should feel humble because of his weakness, not self-important because of the kindness shown to him. In this way all members will be at peace. First and foremost, there should be no word or sign of the evil of grumbling" (RB 34).

In Chapter 55 ("The Clothing and Footwear of the Brothers") St. Benedict shows his fatherly care in the choice of clothing, which is related to local conditions and climate. New clothing is to be altered to provide proper fit for the monk; old clothing is to be stored in a wardrobe for the poor. Importance is given to the reasonability of costs. The monk is to have two sets of clothing and to accept the color and coarseness of materials. He is to launder them as needed. All superfluous things should be taken away; loaned articles must be returned immediately after use; and all other necessary items should be provided so that there is no excuse for private ownership. Following these guidelines, the abbot is able to "take into account the weaknesses of the needy not the evil will of the envious" (RB 53:21) while he bears in mind God's retribution. Chapter 58 ("The Procedure for Receiving Brothers") states, "If [the monk being received into the community] has any possessions, he should either give them to the poor beforehand, or make a formal donation of them to the monastery, without keeping a single thing for himself, well aware that from that day he will not have even his own body at his disposal" (RB 58:24-25). In the oratory the monk is "stripped of everything that he is wearing and clothed in what belongs to the monastery" (RB 58:26).

Peace is maintained in the community when the abbot himself appoints the prior and other officials. If he has a prior, he is to choose him with prudence to avoid pride that leads to "envy, quarrels, slander, rivalry, factions, and disorders of every kind" (RB 65:7). Chapter 7 ("Humility") reminds us that "if we want to reach the highest summit of humility" to "attain speedily that exaltation in heaven to which we climb by the humility of this present life," we must remember that, in the spiritual realm, we descend by self-exaltation and ascend by humility (RB 7:5-9,67). All of these guidelines

lead the monk to “prefer nothing whatever to Christ, [so that Christ may] bring us all together to everlasting life” (RB 72:11-12).

To help ensure that we keep our focus on Christ and avoid entanglements that involve hope for future material gain, we should avoid treating rich people with special preference. Also, indulging in luxuries can lead us to become attached to those material goods and to lose a sense of solidarity with poor people; we may find ourselves becoming insensitive to their needs. Simplicity of life can help us to witness to one another that by our baptism (for monks also by religious vows) we have died to ourselves and have risen with Christ. We need to discipline ourselves to act in ways that intensify our longing for Christ; we must learn to love poverty as a means of growing closer to Christ. Monastic simplicity means keeping our hearts devoted to Christ and keeping everything else subservient to our love for Him.

### **2.5 Poverty of Spirit and Humility**

Poverty of spirit and humility call us to an inner detachment from getting our way and from desiring to feel important. This poverty is akin to humility, which is an honest recognition of who we are and who God is. We need to accept ourselves as weak human beings who are prone to sin; we need to see God as our Creator and loving Redeemer. The habit of avoiding excessive self-appreciation is a healthy way to accept our human nature honestly with its flaws and weaknesses and to realize that we are utterly dependent on God for everything. Though we may work hard to improve our spiritual disciplines, we must realize that we will always remain to some extent imperfect on this earth. We are always in need of God’s help and grace.

All the saints practiced poverty of spirit and humility. Each one lived a life that ran counter to the culture in which he or she lived. For us to grow in sanctity we must find ways to distance ourselves from contemporary Western culture. We must recognize our human weaknesses and our absolute need for God, and call on Him to strengthen us so that we may abide in the poverty and simplicity of Christ Himself.

### **2.6 Poverty and Simplicity of Life in Scripture**

The poverty and simplicity of life demanded by Benedictine spirituality is rooted in Scripture. Examples of poverty and simplicity of life exist in the Old Testament. Before Adam and Eve acted in disobedience to God, they walked humbly with God. “The man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame” (Gen 2:25). God reveals Himself simply as one God: “See now that I, I alone, am he, and there is no god besides me” (Dt 32:39). David, the powerful and rich King of Judah, showed deep humility and poverty of spirit when he came before the Lord and asked for forgiveness: “Against you, you alone have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your eyes. A clean heart create for me,

God; renew within me a steadfast spirit” (Ps 51:6,12). King Solomon recognized his absolute need for God in order to govern the people of Israel wisely: “Give your servant, therefore, a listening heart to judge your people and to distinguish between good and evil. For who is able to give judgment for this vast people of yours? The Lord was pleased by Solomon’s request” (1 Kgs 3:9-10).

In the New Testament, Mary’s pure poverty and simplicity was seen in her perfect acceptance of God’s will for her to become the Mother of God. It was in complete poverty and humility that Jesus grew in the womb of Mary, was born in the manger in Bethlehem, and grew to maturity in Nazareth. When Jesus began His mission and called his disciples, they left all that they had and followed Him. In the Garden of Olives the night before His Passion and Death, Jesus Christ showed His deep poverty, humility, obedience, and trust in His Father as “He advanced a little and fell prostrate in prayer, saying, ‘My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will’” (Mt 26:39 [Lk 22:42]).

## **2.7 Poverty and Fragility of Life**

Reason alone also tells us that human nature is poor and completely dependent on God. Man’s persistent folly, the occurrence of natural disasters, and many personal tragedies are beyond our control. Though man may feel as if the world is getting better because of his achievements, in actuality the world remains in a state of poverty and fragility. One thing that we cannot escape is death which is the ultimate act of dispossession. No matter how much we have toiled in this world, we must leave our work and our possessions behind.

The greatest expression of poverty, humility, obedience, and simplicity is found in Christ, “Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross. Because of this, God greatly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, of those in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil 2:6-11).

All of this should encourage us and energize us to do what is most needed – to look to Christ, to follow Him, to die to ourselves, and to “place [our] hope in God alone” (RB 4:41). Monastic profession and the commitment of Oblation anticipate death; we are called as baptized Christians to die to the world and to live for Christ. For Christians who have placed God first and have striven to live according to His commandments, death is a doorway that leads to eternal life with Christ. The practice of poverty is a work that demands faith; it also produces much fruit. Through Christian poverty energy

and resources that are available to us become channeled in a way that leads us to God. In living a life based on poverty and simplicity of life, we become wealthy in all of the spiritual graces that prepare us for eternity.

Let us not hold on to anything that separates us from God or sets us against Him. “It is [God] who gives to everyone life and breath and everything. He made from one the whole human race to dwell on the entire surface of the earth, and he fixed the ordered seasons and the boundaries of their regions, so that people might seek God, even perhaps grope for him and find him, though indeed he is not far from any one of us. For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’” (Acts 17:25-28).

“The Lord grieves over the rich, because they find their consolation in the abundance of goods” (CCC #2547). When we renounce ourselves and abandon ourselves to the providence of God, we become freed from the pressures and anxieties of being preoccupied with tomorrow. This form of detachment is necessary for us to enter heaven. When we practice poverty and simplicity of life, we prepare ourselves for the certainty of bodily death and the fullness of life that lies beyond. With our hope in Christ, we move closer to fulfillment in the Kingdom of God and to seeing the Father and experiencing His limitless blessings in heaven.

## **2.8 Giving Our Material Possessions**

“For it is in giving that we receive; it is in dying that we are born to eternal life” (Prayer of St. Francis). At times we may question whether we will have surplus to give to others in need. It is good to consider the poor widow who put two small coins to the treasury while many rich people put in large sums. Jesus told His disciples that she “put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury for they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood” (Mk 12:41-44, [Lk 21:1-4]). God calls us to give according to our means; when our giving, no matter how small, comes from our poverty, we become rich in the sight of God – rich in His graces. Let us be reassured in Christ that we are blessed when we find ourselves in situations when we can humbly give only “two coins.”

## **2.9 Giving Our Time and Attention**

Material giving may be much easier than the compassionate giving of our time and attention to others in need. If we are involved in a project, we may be unexpectedly interrupted by someone in need who asks us to speak with him or her or to take some time to help. That person may be someone of importance in our lives, or it may be our neighbor who lives alone and needs some company. At other times we may have plans for some leisure (even “holy leisure”) and find that an important need is placed before us that calls us to sacrifice some (or all) of our time. Though we hope to finish a project

or to be blessed with rest, we are asked instead to give; we are asked to obey and to give some of our time for the sake of another in need. We may find perseverance in prayer or study of Scripture difficult at times; when we persevere, we are giving of ourselves even though we feel that we lack enthusiasm or energy. At such times we die to self and from our poverty are able to give precious gifts to the Lord and to each other.

## 2.10 Doing All That We Do with Love for Christ

All that we do should be done with love for Christ, for “if I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor 13:3). So let us “prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to everlasting life” (RB 72:11-12).

## 3. SUMMARY

3.1 Which Is the First of All the Commandments? (*Mk 12:28-34*  
*[Dt 6:4-9, Mt 22:36-40, Lk 10:27]*)

- A. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.”
- B. “The second is this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”
- C. “He is One and there is no other than He.”
- D. To love God in this way is “worth more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”
- E. The disciple who understands this is “not far from the Kingdom of God.”

3.2 What Monastic Poverty and Simplicity of Life Can Teach Us

- A. Reliance on God
- B. Common sharing in community and interdependence
- C. Equal dignity of all persons in community or family
- D. The truth that baptism (also consecration for vowed religious) calls us to be poor as Christ was poor
  - 1. Non-ownership, which means being denied some private possessions because of our focus being placed on God and on the community needs
  - 2. Being stripped of self-will to follow the will of God

3.3 Why Dispossession Is Difficult for Us

- A. Our world sees wealth as a sign of importance.
- B. We tend to rely on consumer goods to fill our inner emptiness.

- C. We often lack the clear vision to see poverty as a value.
- D. We may lack the discipline to practice self-denial, and so we tend to act on impulse.

### 3.4 Value of Material Poverty

- A. Historically, the fervor and virtue of a monastic community have been linked with its practice of poverty.
- B. Simplicity of life helps us to not worry so much about material things and maintaining them so that we become more disposed to focus our desires on Christ and our call to follow Him.
- C. “If we were really indifferent to material wealth, then we would treat everyone like millionaires” (Strangers to the City, p. 81).
- D. At times we may find ourselves attached to opinions, routines, and schedules; these attachments need to be set aside if we discover that they hinder us from following God’s will.
- E. With our focus on Christ, we are able to detach ourselves from what is unnecessary and attach ourselves to what is necessary, so that we are able to recognize the dignity of each person; “Christ is to be adored because He is indeed welcomed in them” (RB 53:7).
- F. The Rule offers much guidance in ordering one’s life to be in accord with Christian poverty and simplicity of life (Chapters 4, 5, 7, 33, 34, 55, 58, 65, 72).
- G. Here are some practical insights:
  - 1. Beware of treating rich people with special preference.
  - 2. Having luxuries can lead us to become attached to them and to lose a sense of solidarity with poor people.
  - 3. Simplicity of life can help us to witness to one another and to others that we are consecrated to Christ by baptism (and perhaps by religious promises and vows).
- H. We must learn to love poverty as a means of growing closer to Christ.

### 3.5 Poverty of Spirit and Humility

- A. We are called to an inner detachment from “getting our way” and feeling self important.

- B. This poverty is akin to humility, which is an honest acceptance of who we are (weak human beings prone to sin) and who God is (our Creator and loving Redeemer).
- C. It is healthy to admit that:
  - 1. We should honestly avoid excessive self-appreciation.
  - 2. We are utterly dependent on God for everything.
  - 3. We are imperfect in our spiritual disciplines and therefore need to work hard at them.
- D. Humility is countercultural.
  - 1. All the saints practiced poverty of spirit and humility.
  - 2. We need to distance ourselves from contemporary Western culture and its secularist philosophy.

### 3.6 Poverty and Simplicity of Life in Scripture

- A. Some Old Testament passages on those values are:
  - 1. Adam and Eve walked humbly with God (Gen 2:25).
  - 2. God reveals Himself as one God (Dt 32:39).
  - 3. King David showed deep humility and spiritual poverty in asking God for forgiveness from sin (Ps 51:6,12).
  - 4. King Solomon recognized his absolute need for God in governing the people (1 Kgs 3:9-10).
- B. Some New Testament passages on these values are:
  - 1. Mary's fiat was said in perfect obedience, poverty, and simplicity (Lk 1:38).
  - 2. In complete poverty and humility Jesus grew in the womb of Mary, was born in the manger in Bethlehem, and grew to maturity in Nazareth.
  - 3. The first disciples of Jesus immediately left all they had and followed Him.
  - 4. Jesus showed His deep poverty, humility, and obedience in accepting the will of the Father when praying in the Garden of Gethsemane and most significantly during His Passion and Death (Mt 26:39 [Lk 22:42]; Phil 2:6-11).

### 3.7 Poverty and Fragility of Life

- A. There is much in the world that we cannot control:
  - 1. Man's folly
  - 2. Natural disasters

3. Personal tragedies

- B. Though some may feel that the world is getting better because of human achievements, in actuality the world remains in a state of poverty and fragility of life.
- C. The ultimate act of dispossession is death.
  - 1. Death is the doorway to eternal life with Christ.
  - 2. Monastic profession and Oblation anticipate death; we thereby die to the world.
  - 3. We can learn to look to Christ, to follow Him, to die to ourselves, and to “place [our] hope in God alone” (RB 4:41).
- D. Poverty is a work of faith; lack of worry about earthly welfare means

3.8 Giving Our Material Possessions

- A. “For it is in giving that we receive; it is in dying that we are born to eternal life” (Prayer of St. Francis).
- B. The poor widow “put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury for they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood” (Mk 12:41-44, [Lk 21:1-4]).
- C. God calls us to give according to our means; when our giving, no matter how small, comes from our poverty, we become rich in the sight of God.
- D. Let us be reassured in Christ that we are blessed when we find ourselves in situations when we can humbly give only “two coins.”

3.9 Giving Our Time and Attention

- A. Material giving may be much easier than the compassionate giving of our time and attention.
- B. We may be unexpectedly interrupted in our work by someone in need.
- C. Our plans for leisure (even holy leisure) may need to be sacrificed for the service of someone in need.
- D. We may lack enthusiasm and energy for prayer or study yet persevere in the attempt.

3.10 Doing All That We Do with Love for Christ

- A. “If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor 13:3).

- B. "So let us "prefer nothing whatever to Christ, and may he bring us all together to everlasting life" (RB 72:11-12).

#### **4. SUPPLEMENTARY READING**

##### **4.1 Care for the Poor; Social Concerns**

Towards the end of his earthly life, St. Benedict had a special vision of the whole world as penetrated by a single ray of light (St. Gregory's Dialogues, Book II, ch. 35). Striving to find God in all things and all things in God, Oblates are encouraged to nurture consciousness of the needs of the world's poor and to share in God's solidarity with those who suffer oppression, violence, hunger, prejudice, and the denial of their dignity, whether they be the unborn, the elderly, or the handicapped. One means to deepen such awareness is involvement with the monasteries of the Third World through AIM, the Alliance for International Monasticism.

##### **4.2 Prophetic Witness**

The monks of St. Benedict's time witnessed to Christian values that were often contrary to the norms of their society. In the monastery there was to be no distinction according to social class or wealth, and there was to be no room for arrogant behavior, vicious talk, or even judgmental thoughts. Likewise, in today's self-seeking society, which worships idols of wealth, status, pleasure, and material excess, the Oblate, standing firm in Christ and with the monastic community, can joyfully witness in word and deed to very different values. The early monks were seen as successors of prophets like Elijah and John the Baptist, who denounced people's enslavement to the status quo; "the willingness to reject this classic idolatry in order to move resolutely into the mystery of God is therefore an expression of the deepest monastic instinct" (RC, #82) -- and of the Oblates' commitment to live with the vision and courage that will bring about God's Kingdom on earth. Thus Oblates, as groups and as individuals, seek gently but boldly to proclaim the primacy of God, the sacredness of life, the integrity of the family, and the urgent need to reach out to the poor and underprivileged.

##### **4.3 Stewardship and Care for the Environment**

In the Rule material things are not to be used for personal aggrandizement; rather the goods of the monastery are to be shared by all, and the monks are to "regard all utensils and goods of the monastery as sacred vessels of the altar" (RB 31:12). Oblates likewise share in this outlook of stewardship for all of God's creation. In God's plan things are not made to be abused and carelessly thrown away. Therefore, in contrast to the utilitarian, materialistic trends of modern Western society, Oblates learn to use only

what they need, to treat all material things with reverence, and to nurture an informed care for the environment according to the delicate balance created by God. Oblates also regard all goods as the common possession of all people on the earth and are ready to share their surplus with the poor, who often suffer the most from environmental destruction.

## 5. SUPPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

### Books

Fr. Philip F. Mulhern, O.P. *Dedicated Poverty*. (Alba House)

Sr. Jeremy Hall, O.S.B. *Silence, Solitude, Simplicity*. (Liturgical Press)

Fr. Michael Casey, O.C.S.O. *Strangers to the City* (Chapter 6). Paraclete Press, 2008.

Fr. Donald S. Raila, O.S.B., *Lessons from Saint Benedict: Finding Joy in Daily Life* (Chapters 9, 16, 17, and 19). Sacred Winds Press, 2011.

Fr. Cyprian Smith, O.S.B. *The Path of Life: Benedictine Spirituality for Monks and Lay People* (Chapter 11). Ampleforth Abbey Press, 2004.

Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC, #2628, #2709-2719), United States Catholic Conference, Inc., 1994.

### YouTube

Brother Romuald Duchene, OSB. *Poverty and Simplicity*. St. Vincent Archabbey. November 2022. <https://vimeo.com/776256793>

A Benedictine life of simplicity and beauty at Assumption Abbey in Richardton, North Dakota. [https://youtu.be/pf135MBO\\_X8](https://youtu.be/pf135MBO_X8)

A Poverty of Spirit | Lenten Reflection from Father John Kartje, Mundelein Seminary. March 2019 <https://youtu.be/NcRsQkk221w>

## 6. REFLECTION QUESTIONS

This [link](#) provides an opportunity to share your responses to a few questions after you have read, reflected on and prayed over a lesson's topic. (It is not required to provide answers to the questions but Oblate Novices are encouraged to do so.)

### Oblates & Genuine Conversion

This section contains two factual questions; all answers are found in that lesson or pertain to it.

- 1. Why is dispossession so difficult for us? What blurs our vision so that we do not see poverty and simplicity of life as necessary Christian values?**
- 2. Self-centeredness and material goods cannot satisfy our inner emptiness. What do monastic poverty and simplicity of life teach us in regard to our relationship with Christ and with one another?**

### **Personal Conversion of Life**

This section contains your choice of one reflection question. Please reply to one of the following three questions (though you are welcome to reply to more than one, if you wish):

- 3. Christian poverty and simplicity of life call us to detach ourselves from unnecessary material possessions and self-centered goals so that we may place God first in our life. In what ways can we become “poor in Christ” and thus offer God a living sacrifice of praise? In what ways could this change benefit others?**
- 4. Why is it important for Christians to remember that one day we will die and be dispossessed of all worldly things? What can we do now to prepare ourselves for death while living in the world so that we walk on the path to eternal life?**
- 5. Are you aware of times when you block God from acting through you due to self-will? Do you see how you may experience the freedom to say “yes” to God instead of resisting Him?**

## **APPENDIX 12 – Additional Optional References for Lesson 12**

### **Full Texts of Scripture and Rule Verses**

(This section provides more passages from the Old and New Testament and the Holy Rule. It is your choice as to whether you wish to use just a few Scripture references for study and prayer or if you wish to refer to all of them over the month.)

#### **Old Testament Scripture**

**Dt 1:17** “In rendering judgment, do not consider who a person is; give ear to the lowly and to the great alike, fearing no one, for the judgment is God’s.”

**Jb 5:11,16,20,24-26** “He sets up the lowly on high, and those who mourn are raised to safety. Thus the needy have hope, and iniquity closes its mouth. In famine he will deliver you from death, and in war from the power of the sword. And you shall know that your tent is secure; taking stock of your household, you shall miss nothing. You shall approach the grave in full vigor, as a shock of grain comes in at its season.”

**Jb 34:19-20** “Who neither favors the person of princes, nor respects the rich more than the poor? For they are all the work of his hands; in a moment they die, even at midnight.”

**Ps 9:19** “For the needy will never be forgotten, nor will the hope of the afflicted ever fade.”

**Ps 10:14** “But you do see; you take note of misery and sorrow; you take the matter in hand. To you the helpless can entrust their cause; you are the defender of orphans.”

**Ps 10:17** “You listen, LORD, to the needs of the poor; you strengthen their heart and incline your ear.”

**Ps 34:7** “This poor one cried out and the LORD heard, and from all his distress he saved him.”

**Ps 51:19** “My sacrifice, O God, is a contrite spirit; a contrite, humbled heart, O God, you will not scorn.”

**Ps 72:12-14** “For he rescues the poor when they cry out, the oppressed who have no one to help. He shows pity to the needy and the poor and saves the lives of the poor. From extortion and violence he redeems them, for precious is their blood in his sight.”

**Ps 86:1** “Incline your ear, LORD, and answer me, for I am poor and oppressed.”

**Ps 116:6-7** “The LORD protects the simple; I was helpless, but he saved me. Return, my soul, to your rest; the LORD has been very good to you.”

**Ps 131:1-2** “LORD, my heart is not proud; nor are my eyes haughty. I do not busy myself with great matters, with things too sublime for me. Rather, I have stilled my soul, like a weaned child to its mother, weaned is my soul.”

**Ps 140:13-14** “For I know the LORD will take up the cause of the needy, justice for the poor. Then the righteous will give thanks to your name; the upright will dwell in your presence.”

**Ps 144:3-4** “LORD, what is man that you take notice of him; the son of man, that you think of him? Man is but a breath, his days are like a passing shadow.”

**Prv 13:7** “One acts rich but has nothing; another acts poor but has great wealth.”

**Prv 22:1-2** “A good name is more desirable than great riches, and high esteem, than gold and silver. Rich and poor have a common bond: the LORD is the maker of them all.”

**Eccl 5:14** “As they came forth from their mother’s womb, so again shall they return, naked as they came, having nothing from their toil to bring with them.”

**Is 58:6-11** “Is this not, rather, the fast that I choose: releasing those bound unjustly, untying the thongs of the yoke; setting free the oppressed, breaking off every yoke? Is it not sharing your bread with the hungry, bringing the afflicted and the homeless into your house; clothing the naked when you see them, and not turning your back on your own flesh? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your wound shall quickly be healed; your vindication shall go before you, and the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard. Then you shall call, and the LORD will answer, you shall cry for help, and he will say: ‘Here I am!’ If you remove the yoke from among you, the accusing finger, and malicious speech; If you lavish your food on the hungry and satisfy the afflicted; then your light shall rise in the darkness, and your gloom shall become like midday; then the LORD will guide you always and satisfy your thirst in parched places, will give strength to your bones and you shall be like a watered garden, like a flowing spring whose waters never fail.”

**Zep 3:12-13** “But I will leave as a remnant in your midst a people humble and lowly, Who shall take refuge in the name of the LORD—the remnant of Israel.”

### **New Testament Scripture**

**Lk 6:20 (Mt 5:3)** “And raising his eyes toward his disciples he said: ‘Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours.’”

**Mt 5:42** “Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.”

**Mt 6:25-34** “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat [or drink], or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds in the sky; they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more important than they? Can any of you by worrying add a single moment to your life-span? Why are you anxious about clothes? Learn from the way the wild flowers grow. They do not work or spin. But I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was clothed like one of them. If God so clothes the grass of the field, which grows today and is thrown into the oven tomorrow, will he not much more provide for you, O you of little faith? So do not worry and say, ‘What are we to eat?’ or ‘What are we to drink?’ or ‘What are we to wear?’ All these things the pagans seek. Your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom [of God] and his righteousness, and all these things will be given you besides. Do not worry about tomorrow; tomorrow will take care of itself.”

**Mt 19:21** “Jesus said to him, ‘If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to [the] poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.’”

**Mt 19:23-24** “Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘Amen, I say to you, it will be hard for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for one who is rich to enter the kingdom of God.’”

**Lk 2:7** “She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.”

**Lk 3:11** “He said to them in reply, ‘Whoever has two tunics should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise.’”

**Lk 5: 27-28** “After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi sitting at the customs post. He said to him, ‘Follow me.’ And leaving everything behind, he got up and followed him.”

**Lk 16:13** “No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

**Jn 6:35** “Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst.’”

**Jn 7:37-38** “On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and exclaimed, ‘Let anyone who thirsts come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as scripture says: ‘Rivers of living water will flow from within him.’”

**2 Cor 8:9** “For you know the gracious act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that for your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich.”

**Phil 4:12-13** “I know indeed how to live in humble circumstances; I know also how to live with abundance. In every circumstance and in all things I have learned the secret of being well fed and of going hungry, of living in abundance and of being in need. I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me.”

**Phil 4:19** “My God will fully supply whatever you need, in accord with his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.”

**1 Tm 6:7, 10** “For we brought nothing into the world, just as we shall not be able to take anything out of it. For the love of money is the root of all evils, and some people in their desire for it have strayed from the faith and have pierced themselves with many pains.”

**1 Tm 6:17-19** “Tell the rich in the present age not to be proud and not to rely on so uncertain a thing as wealth but rather on God, who richly provides us with all things for our enjoyment. Tell them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous, ready to share, thus accumulating as treasure a good foundation for the future, so as to win the life that is true life.”

**2 Tm 2:11** “This saying is trustworthy: If we have died with him we shall also live with him.”

**2 Tm 4:6-8** “For I am already being poured out like a libation, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have competed well; I have finished the race; I have kept the faith. From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance.”

**Heb 13:5** “Let your life be free from love of money but be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never forsake you or abandon you.’”

**Jas 2:1-5** “My brothers, show no partiality as you adhere to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ. For if a man with gold rings on his fingers and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and a poor person in shabby clothes also comes in, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say, ‘Sit here, please,’ while you say to the poor one, ‘Stand there,’ or ‘Sit at my feet,’ have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil designs? Listen, my beloved brothers. Did not

God choose those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom that he promised to those who love him?”

### **The Rule of St. Benedict**

**RB Prol: 15, 22-35, 42-44, 48-50** “Is there anyone here who yearns for life and desires to see good days? (Ps 34:13).” St. Benedict outlines what is needed to dwell in the Lord’s tent. “Not to us, Lord, not to us give the glory, but to your name alone (Ps 115:1).” In these verses St. Benedict asks us to answer God’s

call to seek the Lord by following his Rule. He points to those who fear the Lord and who know that it is by the Lord’s power that good is found in them and in their works; they do not take credit or become elated over their good deeds. “...then, while there is still time... we must run and do now what will profit us forever.”

**RB 4:10-19** This chapter outlines the tools for good works calling upon us to reject pride, to renounce ourselves to follow Christ, to discipline ourselves, to love fasting, and to answer the needs of the poor.

**RB 4:41** “Place your hope in God alone.”

**RB 5:4,10-12** This chapter speaks of those who are impelled by love to take the narrow road that leads to eternal life; they do not live according to their whims, appetites, and personal judgment but immediately accept the authority of the abbot.

**RB 7:5-9, 67** “...if we want to reach the highest summit of humility...to attain speedily that exaltation in heaven to which we climb by the humility of this present life..” we must remember that we descend by self-exaltation and ascend by humility.

**RB 33** This chapter teaches that the evil practice of monks having private ownership within the monastic community should be uprooted so that, without an order from the abbot, no one presumes to call anything his own so that all things are held in common possession to serve the needs of all (Acts 4:32).

**RB 34** Distribution of goods should not be based on favoritism but rather on consideration for weaknesses. “Whoever needs less should thank God and not be distressed, but whoever needs more should feel humble because of his weakness, not self-important because of the kindness shown him. In this way all members will be at peace. First and foremost, there should be no word or sign of the evil of grumbling.”

**RB 55** This chapter shows the fatherly care of St. Benedict related to the necessary clothing and footwear of the brothers. Following these rules, the abbot is able to “take into account the weaknesses of the needy not the evil will of the envious” while bearing in mind God’s retribution.

**RB 58:24-26** This chapter addresses the procedure for receiving brothers. “If he has any possessions, he should either give them to the poor beforehand, or make a formal donation of them to the monastery, without keeping a single thing for himself, well aware that from that day he will not have even his own body at his disposal.” In the oratory the monk is “stripped of everything that he is wearing and clothed in what belongs to the monastery.”

**RB 65:4** Appointments for bishops, abbots, and priors should be done in humility and with prudence to avoid pride that invites envy, quarrels, slander, rivalry, factions, and disorders of every kind.