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A COURSE OF STUDY FOR NOVICES
OF THE BENEDICTINE OBLATES

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A THESIS
Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the Creighton University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the Department of Education

OMAHA, 1959
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INTRODUCTION

Down through the centuries and in countries throughout the world the Benedictine Oblate Movement has flourished in varying degrees. History shows that countless men and women since the time of Saint Benedict have recognized the simplicity and compatibility of the Holy Rule with their own state of life and have adopted it as their guiding principle in the search for the Christian perfection to which all men are called.

Secondary to the attainment of personal sanctification, Benedictine Oblates have left their mark on society in the past, contributing to the general welfare of all by their prayers and good works.

Paradoxical as it may seem, however, the path which has led so many to perfection is not so well defined that each Oblate finds equal opportunity to advance in perfection along the Benedictine way of life. The means by which an Oblate passes through the stages of probation during his novitiate year to the profession of his final oblation, for instance, varies according to the discretion of each Oblate Director. This variation ranges from the Oblate unit which meets once a month for a short sermon and Benediction, to the unit which meets daily for
the recitation of the Divine Office in common.

Too frequently the year of probation ends and the Oblate finds himself in total ignorance as to what actually constitutes true Benedictine spirituality.

The need for a specific type of spiritual training or instruction for Oblates has long been felt but as far as the writer has been able to ascertain from research and contacts with Oblate Directors, no such work has been accomplished in America.

Dom Thomas V. Moore in an article entitled "Benedictine Oblates" in one of the first issues of The Placidian, confirms the need just mentioned when he writes:

... A Benedictine Oblature offers many possibilities of development. First of all there is the Oblate novitiate. How many souls struggle along as best they can to lead a good life, but lack and do not know how to obtain a solid groundwork of spirituality. And how difficult it is for an earnest priest to give to those souls who depend upon him adequate instruction in spiritual doctrine. Could the Oblate novitiate be developed so as to help to supply in some small measure this evident spiritual need of our day? Evidently it would be impossible for a small group of men to give the viva voce conference that would be needed here, there, and everywhere to import a good course of spiritual doctrine. But could this be done in any other way?

Many souls have obtained their insight into the spiritual life by reading rather than by hearing. At all events, much can be gathered of deep spiritual value by reading well chosen books. Could the Oblate novice be directed during the period of his postulancy and novitiate so that he would absorb a good deal of sound Benedictine spirituality by a wisely planned course of reading in spiritual literature?
Could one make, in other words, the Benedictine Oblature something more than membership in a sodality? Should not all Oblate laymen know how to serve Mass and be regularly in the church on weekday mornings to be called upon when wanted? Would it be possible for certain groups of Oblates to learn the plain-song and chant vespers at their weekly meetings with all the ceremonies of the Liturgy? Could not a life for the ancient music of the Church be developed and extended by the proper training of lay Oblates in Ecclesiastical Music and the Liturgy? 

We have in the Church in America today much wholesome activity. Are there not some souls that seek a deeper spiritual foundation for their life’s work; and could not the Benedictine Oblature be given a form of expression that would lead them to a living experience of the Divine Presence in their life and work, and spiritualize every moment of the day?

It is the primary purpose of this thesis to outline, in a simplified form, a course of study which might serve as a guide for Oblate Directors in their attempt to lay a groundwork of Benedictine spirituality for Oblate novices in their charge.

The author in no way professes to be an authority on the training of Oblates. The work at hand is merely an attempt to formulate a systematic plan of study to be used by the busy Director as he deems expedient. The subjects treated may be expanded or limited to meet the needs of each individual Oblate unit. It is sincerely hoped that this humble beginning will inspire a competent

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Benedictine Oblate Director to undertake a more complete and dogmatic work which might eventually lead to some uniformity in the basic training of Oblate novices.

Prior to determining the subject matter to be treated in this work the writer had the occasion to be present at the Third National Meeting of Spiritual Directors of Oblates held at Saint Benedict's Abbey, Atchison, Kansas in 1956, at which time the nature of the thesis was explained to and discussed by the Oblate Directors who were present.

Following the meeting the writer contacted some twenty Directors who made suggestions and generously offered to be of further assistance by submitting subjects which they thought necessary for the contents of a study guide for Oblate Novices.

Among the suggestions which were later received from the Father Directors was an invaluable letter from his excellency Rt. Rev. Ignatius Esser, O.S.B., former Archabbot of St. Meinrad Archabbey, St. Meinrad, Indiana, who is at present acting in the capacity of Chaplain at St. Joseph Convent, Tulsa, Oklahoma. Father Abbot himself had at one time seriously considered working out definite plans for developing a series of printed lessons to be used by the Oblate Novice during his year's
probation. He submitted to the writer of this thesis a
detailed outline of the twenty-five lessons he had pro-
posed to use for his lesson plan. Father Abbot's letter
and lesson suggestions appear in the appendix to this
work.

The topics for the nine ensuing lessons, there­
fore, are representative of the suggestions made to the
writer by experienced Oblate Directors themselves.

Besides the direct contact made with Oblate Di­
rectors, the only other related literature available for
this work was the minutes of the National Meetings of
the Spiritual Directors of Oblates in the United States.
LESSON I

THE LIFE OF ST. BENEDICT

"Blessed of God by grace and name."

St. Gregory the Great

Saint Benedict was born in a small town of Nursia in the province of Umbria, Italy, in 480. Though little is known of the early boyhood of the saint, historians tell us that he probably received his basic elementary education and classical learning in Nursia, while at the same time he enjoyed the tender paternal guidance of his wealthy and influential patrician father, Anicius Eupropius, and his loving mother, Abundantia.

Saint Benedict had a twin sister, Scholastica, who in later years assisted him in the government of one of his convents.

When Benedict's education was terminated in Nursia, his father decided to send him to Rome to receive the training becoming the son of a wealthy nobleman.

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Cyrilla, who had been his faithful nurse since childhood, was delegated by Benedict's father to accompany the young man of seventeen to Rome and to minister to his every need.

It was an anxious and a precious charge, but it was her only one and she gave all the love of a faithful heart to fulfill it. Rome was at that time a hotbed of vice: and in the midst of its wickedness Cyrilla, with ever watchful eye, preserved intact in her charge the bloom of innocence, and kept undimmed the light of grace in his soul. God had given him special gifts, for He had designed him for a great mission; he was intelligent, quick at learning, and most remarkable for interior recollection; he cared not for the games and pleasures of other boys, but delighted to be alone with God.3

Being repelled by the vices which were prevalent in the degenerate city, Benedict abandoned his life of learning at Rome and left behind the dangers which were threatening his peace of mind and holy life. Saint Gregory, his devoted disciple and biographer, tells us that he left Rome "... instructed with learned ignorance, and furnished with unlearned wisdom."4

He made his way to Enfide, a hamlet at the foot of the Sabine mountains about thirty-five miles from Rome. It was here that he worked a miracle in behalf of Cyrilla,

3Ibid., p. 2.

his nurse by mending a sieve she had borrowed and broken.

This incident came to the knowledge of the townspeople who caused the sieve to be hung in the doorway of the church so that people could be reminded of the holiness of the youth.

But Benedict, desiring rather the miseries of the world than the praises of men, rather to be wearied with labour for God's sake than to be exalted with transitory commendation, fled privily from his nurse, and went into a desert place, called Subiaco, distant almost forty miles from Rome.

On his way to the obscure cave in which he was to live in complete solitude and in union with God, he met Romanus, a monk from a nearby monastery, who gave him the religious habit and promised to provide him with food by means of a basket attached to a rope. Because the cave was at the foot of a precipice and inaccessible to intruders, a bell was attached to the basket to announce to the recluse when bread was being lowered to him.

For three years, in total seclusion from the world, Saint Benedict lived a life of simple prayer in complete detachment, mortification, humility, silence and love of God. This period of retreat was not without its extreme suffering and excruciating temptations. Saint Gregory relates that the devil on one occasion threw a

\[5\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 3}.\]
stone and broke the bell and the rope used by Romanus as he lowered bread to Benedict.  

At another time the Saint experienced a violent temptation of the flesh caused by the remembrance of a particular woman he had seen. So vehemently did the temptation persist, that Benedict determined to leave the cave in pursuit of her. God's grace assisted him in the hour of trial, however, and seeing a thorn bush nearby, he rolled himself in the nettles until the sting of the flesh left him.

Providence did not intend for Benedict to spend his entire life as a hermit. By direct intervention God made known to the inhabitants around Subiaco the holiness of Saint Benedict so that the peasants found him and sought his advice and help in many matters. He attended to their spiritual needs and instructed them.

News of his holiness and kindness spread to the monks of a monastery in the region who at once requested Saint Benedict to rule over them since their own abbot had died. Saint Benedict, knowing of their evil lives, declined the offer by telling the monks that his manner of life was totally in disagreement with the life they

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6Ibid., p. 5.  
7Ibid., pp. 10-11.
wanted to live. After much coercion, however, he gave his consent but, as he had foretold, the monks became dissatisfied and even attempted to poison him. He returned to his cave at Subiaco but solitude was short-lived because of the importunities of those who desired to share in his holy life and live near him. It was at this time that he established twelve monasteries round Subiaco and appointed a superior to rule over each while he retained supervision over all twelve.

he prescribed the observance, frequently visited them, animated them with his own spirit, and tried to form them after the model, that God had taught him during his long term of solitary life. The monks loved him as a father, they venerated him as a saint, they listened with reverence to him as a master, and strove to conform their life to his teaching. St. Benedict had laid the foundation of his title of Patriarch of Western Monks.  

Besides the monks, many noble and religious men of Rome came to St. Benedict and committed their children to be trained by him for the service of God. Among these were Aequitius, who brought his son, Maurus, and Tertullus, the Senator, whose son was Placidus.  

As the fame of the man of God spread throughout the region there were those who envied his holy reputation and resolved to ruin him. One of these men was

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8Snow, op. cit., p. 10. 9Gregory, op. cit., p. 19.
Florentine, a secular priest who was in charge of a neighboring church. He leveled his first attacks against the monks by spreading malicious reports about them. When the desired effects were not forthcoming, he made an attempt upon the life of Benedict by sending him a poisoned loaf which a tame raven removed from his reach. Florentine then attempted to undermine the morals of the young monks. It was this action that made Benedict resolve to leave Subiaco. God immediately punished Florentine by permitting the balcony on which he was standing to collapse killing the infamous priest instantly.

Saint Benedict remained firm in his decision to leave Subiaco and taking with him a chosen few disciples, he set out for a mountain top between Rome and Naples called Monte Cassino, about the year 529. It was at this historical place that he wrote his Holy Rule which has been the guiding light for religious and laymen down through the centuries to the far corners of the world.

Here he worked many miracles and labored untiringly to convert the pagan inhabitants. He destroyed their idols and demolished the pagan temple to Apollo, replacing it with a church he built to St. Martin and an altar erected in honor of St. John the Baptist.

St. Benedict foretold the day of his death which occurred on March 21, 547. He was carried to the church
and resting on the arms of two of his brethren he re-
ceived Holy Communion and with eyes raised to heaven he
expired.

He was buried beside his twin sister, St. Scho-la-
lastica, in the grave that he prepared for himself in
the chapel of St. John the Baptist.

It is related that on the day of his death two
of his monks who were separated from each other had a
vision. They saw a path strewn with rich garments, and
decorated with brilliant lamps leading from the Saint's
cell to heaven and an angel spoke to them saying, "This
is the path by which the beloved of the Lord, Benedict,
ascended up to heaven."10

The life of St. Benedict can best be summed up
in the words of Dom Justin McCann writing about the
death of the Saint.

Thus ended the long years of his monastic effort,
begun in severest isolation from his fellow-men,
consummated in close communion with them of love
and service. The material structure that he had
erected was to be destroyed; but his ideal, the
union of many souls in a common and convergent ef-
fort, each resting on all and deriving strength
from that union, this remained, and was destined
to bear abundant fruit. The Rule in which he en-
shrined his purpose and defined with generous wis-
dom the conditions for its attainment, was to be

the most lasting achievement of his life and to secure him in the world of men an undying influence.  

Discussion Topics for Lesson I:

1. Discuss what you consider to be the underlying principle which prompted St. Benedict to live as a hermit entirely secluded from the world for three years.

2. St. Benedict in his Rule stresses that a man must first be well tested in the discipline of the Rule and have lived a community life under the guidance of an abbot before becoming a hermit or "anchorite." How do you account for the fact that the saint himself reversed this order in his own regard?

3. Great undertakings or accomplishments are many times preceded by a long retreat from the world. Name several as evidenced by the Gospel stories.

4. Discuss the particular virtues demonstrated by St. Benedict in his life and miracles and show how these virtues can be exemplified in the life of the ordinary layman.

5. Parallel incidents in the life, temptations and miracles of St. Benedict with those of Christ during His public life on earth.

READINGS: *

St. Benedict; His Life and Work, by T. F. Lindsay

St. Benedict, by Dom Justin McCann, O.S.B.

St. Benedict, by Abbot Fernand Cabrol, O.S.B.

St. Benedict, A Character Sketch, by Abbot Ildephonse Herwegen, O.S.B.

Hero of the Hills, by Mary Fabyan Windeatt

*The readings listed at the end of each chapter are pertinent to the particular chapter topic and may be found in "The Oblate Library" catalogue from St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota or St. Meinrad's Arch-abbey, St. Meinrad, Indiana.
LESSON II

BENEDICTINE OBLATES

"... if we fulfill the duties of tenants, we shall be heirs of the kingdom of God."
Prologue to the Rule of St. Benedict.

What Is an Oblate?

There comes a time in the life of every Christian when he feels drawn to lead a more perfect life.

Because all Christians are called to perfection—"Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect,"¹ this attempt on the part of man to reproduce God's image within himself is the natural procedure toward his ultimate goal in life. We must, therefore, as St. Benedict suggests in the Prologue to his Rule "... hasten to do now what will profit us for all eternity."²

Those who are earnestly seeking a means to satisfy this burning desire to become more perfect and to enrich their lives spiritually, will find encouragement, inspiration, and satisfaction in the Institute of the Oblates of St. Benedict.

¹ Matt. 5:48.
Benedictine Oblates, according to Theodore Maynard, are:

... men and women living in the world as ordinary Christians, but attached to a particular abbey, not, of course, bound by monastic obligations, though promising conversion of manners. Poverty and chastity (in the sense that they apply to all) are, of course, expected of them, but to the degree that their state of life permits. That is there is no restriction of married life and the poverty looked for can be only poverty of spirit, though in the case of the Oblates both of these virtues are given further force from the fact that they seek to model their lives, in so far as this is possible, according to the Holy Rule.

From this definition it is obvious that the life of an Oblate is a vocation or a calling from God, a special invitation as it were, to the layman to attain a greater degree of holiness and to become more like his Master.

Oblation, then, is a definite way of life, and should be followed only by those who have a serious and sincere attitude toward life in general and a reasonable understanding of the Benedictine spirit in particular.

The more man realizes his own individual nothingness and God's great desire to implant His grace in souls, the more ready he will be to enter into this new way of life.

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Canonically, Oblates are classified with Tertiaries and Third Orders and are, therefore, more than a mere confraternity, sodality or pious union. They form a definite part of the Order of Saint Benedict.

In a brief of Pope Leo XIII, dated July 17, 1898, by a decree of the Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Regulars, dated July 23, 1904, the Statutes and Rule for the Secular Oblates of St. Benedict were given the official approval of the Holy See.  

Although the canonical status of Oblates and the various Tertiaries and Third Orders is the same, there is very little resemblance otherwise. Whereas the latter groups have each had specific Rules written for them at special periods in history, St. Benedict wrote only one rule, and that was for monks living in a monastery. This same rule, however, in a modified form, has proved applicable to laymen living in the world because in reality the Rule is a mere compendium of the Gospel teaching of our Lord.

Nor does a particular date mark the beginning of the Oblates. They seem to have come about as a natural outgrowth of the Benedictine Order itself—a by-product, as it were. There have always been some few of the faithful connected with the earliest monasteries who have

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wished to unite their spiritual efforts to those special dedicated men in God's service. These united offerings of monks and laymen through the centuries have been a practical fulfillment of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ according to the mind of Holy Mother Church.

The Oblate's purpose, then, is more specific than merely leading a good Christian life. He seeks perfection in the ideals of Benedictine life mainly through the liturgy and family living aided in his spiritual conflicts by the prayers and good works of the monks of the particular monastery to which he is affiliated.

History of Oblates

From the humble beginning at Subiaco the association of the monks and lay folk, as mentioned above, was reciprocal in that in return for the participation in the prayers and good works of the monks the layman in turn assisted the religious family according to his means and state of life.

The idea of Oblate is more specifically mentioned in Chapter fifty-nine of the Holy Rule where St. Benedict legislates for the accepting of the children of noblemen who were brought to the monastery to be educated.\footnote{Rule, op. cit., p. 89.}
St. Gregory the Great, in his life of St. Benedict, relates that St. Maurus and St. Placidus were among the first such Oblates—though the word "Oblate" is only implied because the actual term used in the Rule was "offerre" while the act of offering was called "oblatio." 6

The term "Oblate" as we know it today only appeared in the eleventh century and seems to have been popular until the French Revolution.

At the present time there are two types of Oblates. Those who live in a monastery under the discipline of the Rule and obedience to the Abbot are known as Regular Oblates. Secular Oblates are those who live in the world but are affiliated with a monastery of their choice. They do not take vows but solemnly promise to observe the rules of the Oblates, to labor at perfection of life (conversion of manners) until death.

The meaning or definition of Oblates has changed or varied through the centuries but the general concept of offering oneself to God in a more perfect way, and the basic principles of the participation and the mutual sharing in the spiritual benefits, prayers and labours

6Ibid., p. 89.
of the Benedictine family have persisted since the time of St. Benedict.

Although the Secular Oblates have always been prevalent in Europe, the Oblate movement in the United States and Canada is comparatively young. At the third national meeting of spiritual directors of Oblates, held at Saint Benedict's Abbey, Atchison, Kansas, in 1956, it was estimated that there are now between 10,000 and 15,000 Oblates affiliated with monasteries in America, which indicates that the movement is rapidly taking hold in our own country.

**Successive Steps to Final Oblation**

Any faithful Catholic over fifteen years of age, be he layman, cleric or secular priest, may be received as a Benedictine Oblate by the Abbot of a particular monastery or a priest (secular or regular) delegated by him to do so.

The person becomes an Oblate by receiving the small black Oblate scapular of St. Benedict in a ceremony called investiture and thereby enters into a year's probation or novitiate and shares in all of the Oblate privileges.

A year and a day after investiture, arrangements

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7*Kansas City Times*, August 30, 1956, p. 2.
will be made for the Oblate novice to make his final Act of Oblation in the presence of the Abbot or Prior. By this act the person becomes an Oblate for life. This Act of Oblation is not to be mistaken, however, for a vow. Because this act is made solemnly in a sacred rite before God, it is worthy of great respect and fidelity but it does not bind the Oblate under pain of sin.⁸

⁸Deutsch, op. cit., pp. 41-42.
Discussion Topics for Lesson II:

1. From an historical point of view point out reasons for the growth of the Benedictine Oblates through the ages.

2. Discuss the merits of belonging to the Benedictine Oblates over those of becoming a member of a Third Order.

3. Do you think that St. Benedict had Oblates in mind when he began his Order?

4. Explain the difference between becoming a Benedictine by Oblation and by Vow.

5. Discuss your own ideas in regard to how the Oblate Novice should spend the year of probation or novitiate.

READINGS:

A Map of Life, by Frank J. Sheed

Holiness for All, by Archbishop Norbert Robichaud

Of His Fullness, by Rev. Gerald Vann, O.P.

Radiating Christ, by Rev. Raoul Plus, S.J.

The Following of Christ, by Gerard Groote
LESSON III

DUTIES AND PRIVILEGES OF OBLATES

"Behold our Lord in His loving kindness shows us the way of life. Girded therefore with faith and the performance of good works let us by the guidance of the Gospel walk in the way He has marked out for us that we may be worthy to see Him who called us to His kingdom."

Prologue

Duties of Oblates

In the preceding chapters, the nature of the life of a Benedictine Oblate together with a brief history of the Oblates through the centuries have been outlined. This chapter will be devoted to a consideration of the duties incumbent upon the Oblate and to a review of the privileges which he can expect to enjoy by virtue of his oblation.

There is a great danger that by hastily setting down a list of bold, demanding precepts to be followed, one may tempt the ordinary layman to turn away in fear and trembling and abandon what seems at first to him to be an impossibility but which in reality is the sweet voice of the Lord inviting him and pointing the way to salvation.

That St. Benedict anticipated a like reaction on the part of his monks to the Rule he was about to pre-
sent, is evident in the Prologue to the Rule. He cau-
tions the monks:

... do not therefore fly in dismay from the way of salvation, whose beginning cannot but be strait and difficult. But as we go forward in our life and in faith, we shall with hearts enlarged and un-speakable sweetness of love run in the way of God's commandments; so that never departing from His guid-
ance, but persevering in His teaching in the monas-
tery until death, we may by patience share in the sufferings of Christ, that we may deserve to be par-
takers of His kingdom.¹

Before considering specific duties of the Ob-
lates, it would be advisable to study the Prologue to the Rule of St. Benedict which, if considered in its en-
tirety, is well qualified to assist the layman in his year's novitiate, to encourage him along the way as he progresses in his spiritual life towards final oblation.

From a study of the Prologue the layman will be-
come conscious of the truth that there is nothing "harsh or rigorous" in the Benedictine way of life. He will voluntarily surrender himself, ... incline his heart to receive and faithfully fulfill the admonitions of the Father, ... turn from evil and do good, ... seek peace and pursue it.²

As the Prologue points out to the monk the rea-

¹The Rule, op. cit., p. 6.
²Ibid., pp. 2-3.
sonableness of the precepts postulated by St. Benedict in his Rule, so does it show the Oblates the livableness of his duties which are embodied in the same Rule and which are based on the Gospel teachings of Christ.

Donald A. Gallagher, who in 1939 taught philosophy at Marquette University, and who is also a professed Oblate of St. Benedict, stresses this idea of reasonableness of the Rule. He says:

The way of life in which the Rule invites the Oblate to participate in accordance with his state of life and his capacity is, in a word, eminently human and livable.

Nothing great has ever been accomplished without some difficulty and sacrifice; therefore, it is logical to assume that the great accomplishment of saving one's immortal soul is no exception to the rule.

When the Oblate feels that he is ready to heed the Lord's ultimatum, "If any man will follow me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me," he must then consider the duties of Oblates as laid down for him in the Manual for Oblates of St. Benedict and which are here repeated.

Duties which the writer considers of prime im-

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importance will be pursued at greater length in the ensuing chapters of this work.

Duties of State in Life. Oblates should know that they must first of all fulfill the duties of their state in life with the utmost fidelity; for to neglect what is necessary in order to take upon oneself extraordinary and more perfect obligations is most strongly to be condemned.

Religious Obligations. They shall highly esteem those religious practices which are incumbent upon all the faithful, such as morning and evening prayers, devout assistance at Mass and other sacred functions on Sundays and holy days, prayers before and after meals, and other similar acts of worship.

Family Duties. Above all, they must not neglect their family duties upon which the Apostle so strongly insists, saying: 'But if any man have not care of his own, and especially of those of his house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel' (I Tim. 5,8).

Love of the Sacred Liturgy. Remembering the precept of our holy Father Benedict: 'That nothing is to be preferred to the Work of God' (Holy Rule, ch. 43), Oblates of our Order should zealously cultivate a special love for the sacred liturgy. They should also take an active interest in all that concerns the beauty and adornment of churches and altars, and, in a word, lovingly do what they can to preserve and increase the splendor of divine worship.

Holy Mass and Divine Office. Lay Oblates will, as often as they can, gladly assist at Mass and at the Divine Office chanted by the monks in choir, even on week days; or, if this be not possible, they will at least unite with them in spirit.

Praying the Divine Office. It is, furthermore, very commendable for Oblates to pray either the Divine Office or the Little Office of our Lady, if this be reasonably possible; for, by so doing, they will offer most acceptable prayers to God in the name of the Church, in thanksgiving for favors already received and in petition for new ones.
Devotion to Our Saviour. Among the special devotions which have been approved and recommended by the Church, let Benedictine Oblates give particular preference to the worship of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and to the adoration of His most Sacred Heart, the secrets of which, we rejoice to say, were first revealed to Saints of our Order.

Other Devotions. Oblates should, moreover, cultivate a tender devotion to the Immaculate Mother of God, and pay all due honor to the Angels and Saints, in particular to Saint Joseph and to our glorious Father Benedict, and to all the Saints of the Benedictine Order. Let them love to pray the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, to make the Way of the Cross, and to carry out other pious exercises which are enriched with indulgences.

Prayer for Special Intentions. Let them pray earnestly for the triumph of holy Mother Church, for the spread of religion, for the extirpation of heresies and schisms, for the conversion of infidels, for the repentance of sinners, for the perseverance of the righteous, and for the relief of the souls in purgatory.

Uniting Work with Prayer. Finally, in order to follow the traditions of our Order, let the Oblates combine their prayer with work, so that they may ever be numbered among the fervent doers of good works.

In addition to the above, a few very special obligations of Oblates are as follows:

Daily Prayers. Oblates who recite neither the Breviary nor the Little Office of our Lady, and who do not assist at any of the Canonical Hours, should daily pray the Little Office of the Oblates, or five decades of the Rosary. For a reasonable cause, they may ask the Director of the Oblates to replace these by other shorter prayers.

Daily Morning Offering. Oblates should, each morning, offer their actions of the day to God in honor of the most Sacred Heart of Jesus, in imitation of the example of St. Gertrude the Great.

Daily Examen of Conscience. They should each evening,
examine their conscience as to the manner in which these actions have been performed.

Tuesday Devotion to St. Benedict. Oblates should consecrate Tuesday of every week to our holy Father Benedict, and, even if prevented on other week days, should devoutly assist at Mass at least on that day, or, failing in this, should honor their Father by some other good work.

Meditation. Oblates should, once each month, meditate for a half hour before the Blessed Sacrament, or at least during one Mass each month.

Frequent Communion. Oblates should receive holy Communion frequently, even daily, upon the advice of their confessor.

Monthly Meetings of Oblates. Oblates should regularly attend the monthly meetings and conferences conducted by their Director whenever these take place.

Renewal of Oblation. Oblates should each year renew their Act of Oblation on the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (November 21), which is the principal feast of the Oblates.

Special Feasts for Oblates. In addition, they should keep the feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin (February 2), which was made holy by the oblation of our Saviour in the Temple; also the feasts of our holy Father Benedict (March 21), of Saint Henry, Emperor (July 15), and of Saint Frances of Rome, Widow (March 9), whom they should venerate as their heavenly Patrons.

Burial of Oblates. Oblates may, if they so wish, be buried in the black monastic habit, scapular, and cincture.

Binding Force of these Statutes and Rules. Oblates should, finally, know that these Statutes and Rules do not bind under pain of sin, not even venial sin.

Mottoes for Oblates. Oblates should have as their mottoes: "UT IN OMNIBUS GLORIFICETUR DEUS—That in all things God may be glorified"—and the simple
word 'PAX--Peace.'

As he endeavors to live a sincere Christian life, as he strives to understand the principles inculcated in the Rule and to apply them to his own life, as he lives an intense life of prayer through the liturgy and the Divine Office, the Oblate will find himself in the unique position of living in union with and of sharing in a very real and intimate way the life of men especially consecrated to prayer and sacrifice and dedicated to the service of God.

The more the layman lives his life in conformity to the Will of God as laid down for him in the Rule, the more this "gradual ascent to God" will become one of "unspeakable sweetness of love" and finally he will be deemed worthy to become a partaker of God's kingdom.

Privileges of Oblates

Pope Leo XIII in a letter dated June 17, 1898, gave to the Oblates of St. Benedict certain spiritual favors and indulgences which are in the Manual for Oblates but which, for the sake of convenience, will be repeated here. The Manual suggests that the Oblates make a calendar of these indulgences and feasts for his own use

and place them where he will be constantly reminded of them.

Plenary Indulgences: A Plenary Indulgence can be gained by Oblates of our Order on the day of their reception as Oblate Novices, if they have gone to Confession and received holy Communion.

A Plenary Indulgence can be gained by them on the day of their Profession or final Oblation, if they have gone to Confession and received holy Communion.

A Plenary Indulgence can be gained by them on the following special patronal feasts of the Oblates, if they shall have gone to Confession and received holy Communion, and visited any public oratory or church on these days and there prayed according to the intentions of the Pope: a) the feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (November 21); b) the feast of St. Henry (July 15); c) and the feast of St. Frances of Rome (March 9).

A Plenary Indulgence can be gained by them on any other four days of the year, to be selected once and for all by each Oblate, under the same conditions as in the preceding.

A Plenary Indulgence can be gained by them on the feasts of the Patron and of the Titular of the Abbey to which they belong as Oblates; and if the Abbey has several Patrons and Titulars, on the feast of each of these, under the same conditions as in the preceding.

A Plenary Indulgence can be gained by them in the hour of death, under the usual conditions.

Papal Blessing with Plenary Indulgence. The Papal Blessing with a Plenary Indulgence attached, can be received by Oblates as follows: twice each year, on any two days selected once and for all, when the Oblates, having gone to Confession and received holy Communion, are publicly assembled in some church or public oratory under their respective Moderator or Director according to the prescribed rite.

General Absolution with Plenary Indulgence. The Oblates may also receive General Absolution to which a Plenary Indulgence is attached, either when assembled together in common (as described in the preceding) under their respective Moderator, or privately from
their respective confessor immediately after they have gone to Confession, according to the prescribed rite on the following feasts (or in the afternoon or evening preceding these feasts): a) the Immaculate Conception (December 8); b) the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary (February 2); c) the Friday within the octave of Corpus Christi; d) the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14); e) the feast of St. Joseph, Spouse of the Mother of God (March 19); f) the feast of Sts. Peter and Paul (June 29); g) the Nativity of St. John the Baptist (June 24); h) and the feast of All Saints of the Order of St. Benedict (November 13).

Indulgence of Seven Years and Seven Quarantines. An Indulgence of Seven Years and Seven Quarantines can be gained by Oblates as often as they assist at Mass, with a contrite heart, for the repose of the souls of deceased Oblates.

The same indulgence can be gained by them also as often as they offer a stipend for a Mass to be celebrated for the souls of deceased Oblates.

This same indulgence can be gained by them as often as they assist at the funeral of a deceased Oblate.

And again, they can gain this same indulgence as often as they take part in the monthly meeting of the Oblates.

Oblates should particularly note the following with regard to the preceding indulgences:

All of the above indulgences are applicable to the souls in purgatory.

Oblates living in places where there is no Benedictine church may gain the indulgences, which require a visit to such a church, by visiting any other church or public oratory instead.

If Oblates are prevented from receiving holy Communion or visiting the church on the prescribed day, they can gain all the above indulgences by fulfilling the necessary conditions on the following Sunday.

Whenever an hour of prayer or meditation is prescribed for gaining an indulgence, this hour may be reduced to a half hour, and this condition may even be satisfied during the time of the holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the morning of the day in question.

Oblates, who so desire, may be buried in the black monastic habit, scapular, and cincture.
All ruling Abbots have the power to receive Oblates, and may likewise delegate this power to priests of both the secular and regular clergy.

Whenever the Oblates are unable to go to Confession on the afternoon or evening before a feast, or on the feast itself, for the purpose of receiving General Absolution in the confessional itself, they have the privilege of receiving this General Absolution from their confessor immediately after they have gone to Confession on any of the seven days following the respective feasts.

Since Oblates are expected to wear or carry about their person a medal of St. Benedict, they should know that they can therefore also gain the indulgences attached to this medal. 

To the list of spiritual favors just mentioned, there is yet another singular gift of God, which if omitted, would leave the picture quite incomplete. This gift is so important that it stands alone as the very motto under which Benedictines labor for God—"Pax." This Peace which the world cannot give is a calm, tranquil contentment which is a prelude to that everlasting peace in heaven which will be the reward of those who persevere until the end.

Can anyone afford to bypass the great privilege of becoming an Oblate of St. Benedict?

\[\text{iibid.}, \text{pp.} 52-57.\]
Discussion Topics for Lesson III:

1. Read carefully and discuss with your director the Prologue of the Rule.

2. Show how the advantages to be gained outweigh the sacrifices one makes to become a Benedictine Oblate.

3. Because of circumstances surrounding the lives of laymen, some will not be able to carry out in detail the duties laid down in the manual. Seriously consider the duties which you feel are most necessary for attaining the ideal.

4. Plan a calendar of Benedictine Feasts and days on which indulgences may be gained. Consider having copies printed for all Oblates in your parish.

READINGS:


The Rule, Prologue.
LESSON IV

THE RULE OF ST. BENEDICT

"Listen, O my son, to the precepts of thy master, and incline the ear of thy heart, and cheerfully receive and faithfully execute the admonitions of thy loving Father, that by the toil of obedience thou mayest return to Him from whom by the sloth of disobedience thou hadst gone away."

Prologue to the Rule of St. Benedict.

The object of the preceding lessons has been to present a background of general information for the Oblate or for one contemplating the step. The following lessons will deal more particularly with the means by which the Oblate may be guided to the fulfillment of the ultimate end of his final oblation.

Basic to the study of any phase of Benedictine life is at least a cursory knowledge of the Rule of St. Benedict. Ensuing lessons, therefore, will be devoted to a study of those principles of the Rule which are not only applicable to the Oblate but absolutely necessary for his formation and instruction and which are closely allied to his everyday living.

Outstanding commentaries on the Rule have been written for Oblates and one could do no better than have in his possession a copy of a Commentary for Benedictine Oblates by G. A. Simon, or The Holy Rule for
Laymen by T. F. Lindsay. Such books will prove invaluable to the layman who is sincere in his attempt to imbibe the spirit of St. Benedict.

The object of this lesson, therefore, is not a comprehensive study but rather an introduction of the Oblate to the contents of the Rule, showing how St. Benedict divides the chapters of his Rule, the points he stresses most, and the universality of his precepts to include all Christians.

The Rule is the Oblate's handbook, his infallible guide to Christian perfection. In its divine wisdom and prudence, as Pope Pius XII proclaimed in his Encyclical, Fulgens Radiatur, it is "like a star" guiding restless hearts in these troubled times to real peace, if they will but listen and learn from St. Benedict to seek God.  

St. Gregory the Great in his Dialogues uncompromisingly states that St. Benedict wrote his Holy Rule for monks alone. "The man of God . . . wrote his rule for monks . . . ."


2 Ibid., Preface, p. 6.

3 Luck, op. cit., p. 90.
This thesis, however, has been contested by several writers who have suggested that the Rule was not meant by the holy Patriarch for monks alone but was "deliberately intended to be of universal application." This latter idea has received very little support. It seems more reasonable to agree with St. Gregory that the Rule was primarily written for monks, since it seems to be a legislative document of laws which centers around monastic community life. Aside from the fact that it was written for monks, it must be recognized, however, that in part, the Rule has also served as a practical and potent help to laymen in the world through the centuries, which indicates the great wisdom and universality of the precepts prescribed by the holy legislator.

D. Wilfrid Upson, O.S.B., Abbot of Prinknash in Gloucester, who has a growing conviction of the value of the Holy Rule, and of its applicability not only to monks but also to Christians living in the world, has this encouraging thought to advance:

Human nature is the same whether we respond to the monastic call or whether we live out our lives in a normal worldly environment. Few are so spiritually

minded that they can afford to neglect the help of some sort of rule of life and standard of spirituality to which they can endeavour to conform themselves when faced with the many problems of a world where even moral standards have ceased to exist.\(^2\)

Technically speaking, it makes little difference whether St. Benedict wrote his Rule for monks or if he included Christians in general. Alcuin Deutsch, Abbot and author of several Benedictine works goes so far as to say:

\[\ldots\text{It is only because the Rule is of interest to Christians in general that it is suitable for monks; for St. Benedict's whole aim was to make his monks perfect Christians.}\]

Psychologically, however, it is good for the beginner Oblate to know that the Rule in its vast broadness is all-embracing and surprisingly simple as it affects his own personal life in the world, entirely independent from that of his brother monk who lives by the same Rule in a more strict sense but within the confines of a monastery.

**How the Rule Is Divided**

The Rule, as St. Benedict wrote it and as it


now exists, consists of a Prologue and seventy-three chapters, the last of which is an Epilogue.

Although at first glance the chapters appear to have no logical sequence, further observation shows them related according to similarity of subject matter.

After the Prologue there come three chapters which characterize the form of life which he is instituting and provide its main constitution in the chapter on the abbot, and the chapter on calling the brethren to Council. Then there follow four chapters of fundamental spiritual instruction (4-7). After that we have eleven chapters on the Divine Office (8-18), ending with one on the proper method of assisting at the Office (19) and another on prayer in general (20). After two chapters (21, 22) of particular ordinances (on Deans and sleep) we have a large section devoted to the methods of correcting faults (23-30) of which the legislator has more to say later (43-46). With chapter thirty-one we resume particular ordinances for the life of the monastery (31-42), (47-57). The fifty-eighth chapter begins a section of the Rule which deals with admission into the monastery (58-61). Then we have chapters on the priests of the monastery, the order of the community, the appointment of the abbot, of the prior and gate keeper. The last seven chapters, which are considered to be later than the rest, deal with certain particular points, and the Rule ends with an exhortation to zeal.  

The casual reader tends to become overwhelmed at the number of chapter heads which make up the Rule, but actually when the chapters are broken down into specific broad headings the contents become relatively simple. For instance, St. Benedict chose to write thirteen chap-

7McCann, op. cit., pp. 132-133.
ters on the various phases of the Opus Dei or Divine Office. These chapters might well fall under the broad heading of "Prayer." By grouping all of the chapters of the Rule in this manner, the reader can see which subjects St. Benedict considered most important in the writing of "... this least rule written for a beginning." With a minimum amount of study then, one can easily deduce for himself the underlying principles of the Rule and the more he studies these basic principles, the more his appreciation of the Rule grows into a deep and sincere love of it. At this point the pupil "in the school of the Lord's service" can be said to possess the true Benedictine spirit.

After breaking the chapters down into broad subjects, it is not difficult to see that St. Benedict dwelt at length on those topics concerning prayer, penance, the ordering of the daily life, and participation in community living. In these chapters, as indeed throughout the Rule, St. Benedict lays particular and repeated stress on the virtues of humility, obedience, stability, moderation, and Christian charity.

Because the following lessons will be devoted to

8 Rule, op. cit., p. 108.
9 Ibid., (Prologue), p. 5.
developing these broad subjects in the light of their relation to the Oblate, let it suffice here to make just a few general observations in order to whet the appetite or to entice the reader, as it were, to pursue his study of the Rule—to launch out into the deep and draw in an abundant catch.

The prayer of which St. Benedict speaks in his thirteen chapters is no other than the Divine Office, the official prayer of Holy Mother Church. It is the central function of monastic life and the holy lawgiver makes it clear that nothing is to be preferred to it. All of man's needs, hopes, desires, regrets and moods can be realized in the prayers of the Psalter, and a lifetime of study could not exhaust its possibilities for vocal and mental prayer.

There is no special method of meditation set forth; there are no suggestions for private prayer, other than the admonition that it should be short and simple and said with purity of heart and tears of compunction.\(^\text{10}\)

It is not to be assumed, however, that St. Benedict minimized the value of meditation and private prayer. Rather he takes these things for granted since the monk's whole life is to be a prayer and this he would

\(^\text{10}\text{Ibid., p. 45.}\)
have centered around the Church's liturgy.

Reverence, humility, simplicity, and a realization of the Divine Presence are pre-requisite qualifications for prayer according to St. Benedict. In one chapter (19) of the Rule he clearly conveys his wishes on how one is to pray.

We believe that God is present everywhere and that the eyes of the Lord behold the good and the bad in every place. Let us firmly believe this, especially when we take part in the Work of God. Let us, therefore, always be mindful of what the Prophet saith, "Serve ye the Lord with fear." And again, "Sing ye wisely." And, "I will sing praise to Thee in the sight of the angels." Therefore, let us consider how it becometh us to behave in the sight of God and his angels, and let us so stand to sing, that our mind may be in harmony with our voice. 11

Penal Code

The chapters concerning the monastic penal code give undeniable evidence that St. Benedict was first and foremost a just man. His keen sense of justice, however, seems always to have been tempered by his deep supernatural charity and prudence and his consideration of individual weaknesses of the monks caused him to act at all times with the greatest moderation.

He reminds the Abbot of the Gospel admonition

11Ibid., p. 44.
that they who are healthy do not need a physician, but they who are sick. Further he tells the Abbot to "... take the utmost pains, and strive with all prudence and zeal, that none of the flock entrusted to him perish."\(^{12}\)

The faults that receive the severest reprimands from the saint are those manifesting stubborn self-will, such as rebellion against authority and murmuring, because he detected in them a threat to the family spirit which is characteristic of the Order.

He recommends various degrees of corrections to be determined according to the gravity of the offense. Among those mentioned are mild reprovals, severe fastings, corporal punishment, absence from communal living and finally excommunication.

While the Abbot is to be uncompromising and un­tiring in his effort to correct faults, he is instructed by St. Benedict to

\[ \ldots \text{follow the loving example of the Good Shepherd, who, leaving the ninety-nine sheep on the mountains, went to seek the one that had gone astray, on whose weakness He had such pity, that He was pleased to lay it on His sacred shoulders and thus carry it back to the fold.}^{13}\]

Daily life and all of its implications calls for a well planned program of living. The chapters,

\(^{12}\text{Ibid., p. 50.} \quad ^{13}\text{Ibid., pp. 50-51.}\)
outlining in detail the daily external life in the mon­astery and those regulating community life, exemplify order and harmony in a superlative degree. Although many of the precepts in these chapters are strictly monastic, there is an inevitable storehouse of practical information to be gleaned from them which may well serve the layman's needs in his own daily life, in his associations with members of his immediate family and with those with whom he works and comes into daily contact.

St. Benedict is minute in his legislation concerning such things as what the monk should eat, drink, and wear, how he should act during the hours of the day and during the night. He provides for the old, for the sick, for children and for guests. Among other things, he stresses the importance of hospitality, punctuality, courtesy, order and temperance. Important to successful living, is self-annihilation or selflessness in favor of the common good of all. It might be pointed out again that all these rules are nothing more than a reiteration of the Gospel precepts leading to the perfection of the Christian life.

This sketchy summarization of a few of the chapters of the Rule is far from being exhaustive, nor does it imply that the remaining chapters are of less impor-
tance. On the contrary, each chapter is unique in itself, one complementing the other making each an important and vital part of the whole.

It is hoped, however, that from this bit of writing the reader has at least come to see that,

it [Rule] contains something more than the fixing of a horarium and of punctual prescriptions. It contains a spirit of just measure, elevating the soul in the constant search for God. Far from choking the heart it tends to expand it. It fortifies the will and brings to the judgment a formation for practical appreciation of the things of time and of eternity.

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Discussion Topics for Lesson IV:

1. Do you think St. Benedict wrote the Prologue to his Rule before or after he wrote the Rule proper? Discuss the reasons for your answer.

2. Discuss what you think is meant by the "spirit of St. Benedict." How does one acquire this spirit?

3. Discuss the relationship between the duties of Oblates studied in Chapter III and the Holy Rule of St. Benedict. (Prayer, for example)

4. Discuss ways by which you could get other people interested in reading the Holy Rule.

5. What parts of the Rule do you find most difficult to apply to your own life? What chapters lend themselves more readily to the life of the layman in the world?

READINGS:


Commentary for Benedictine Oblates, G. A. Simon.

The Holy Rule of Our Most Holy Father Benedict, trans. by Rev. Boniface Verheyen, C.S.B.
If we desire to dwell in the tabernacle of His kingdom, we cannot reach it in any way, unless we run thither by good works.

Prologue.

The Oblate is a lay apostle, not because of his oblation, primarily, but rather as a result of the Sacrament of Baptism by which he became incorporated into the Church as a living member of the Mystical Body of Christ.

St. Paul, in his letters to the Ephesians and the Corinthians, stresses the oneness and the unity which exists between the members of the Church under Christ, their Supreme Head, in consequence of Baptism. To the Corinthians he says, "Now you are the body of Christ, member for member."¹ Again he says, "For as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, many as they are, form one body, so also is it with Christ."²

If the Church is a Body, then it is understood

¹I Cor. 12:27. ²Ibid., 12:12.
that the members must be bound together to form a composite unit mutually sharing all things and assisting one another to form a more perfect whole body. This is the absolute duty of the lay apostle, not a devotion or a work of supererogation as many well-meaning Catholics are prone to think.

It is evident from what has been said that the Oblate does not differ from any other baptized Christian as far as his obligation towards the lay apostolate is concerned.

By virtue of his affiliation with a monastic family, however, the Oblate's life, his prayers and good works, take on a greater significance and he becomes more conscious of his great dignity as a member of the Mystical Body, the result of which is a more intensified effort on his part to fulfill the functions of an apostle—namely, personal sanctification and the sanctification and salvation of his neighbor.

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That St. Benedict was steeped in this knowledge and appreciation of the Mystical Body of Christ is confirmed by T. F. Lindsay in his book about the life of St. Benedict.

St. Benedict's aim was not the perfection of the individual considered as an end in itself, nor yet the training of the individual to perform a specific function. His aim, as he himself tells us, was to establish a "school of the Lord's service." This meant that, from the very beginning, he thought of monastic society as an organic whole, drawing its life from a common membership in Christ.

Oneness and unity in the membership of the Church does not imply oneness of capabilities of its members. St. Paul stresses the idea of differences in the members of the Church comparing it to the different functions of the members of the human body.

If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole body were hearing, where would be the smelling? But as it is, God has set the members, each of them, in the body as he willed.

By token of this hierarchical division of members, the Oblate's apostleship then, should render a greater contribution to the whole than that of the ordinary layman, though the contribution of the latter is not to be underestimated. In fact, each Christian has a role to play in the Mystical Body that cannot be filled

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6Lindsay, op. cit., p. 187. 71 Cor. 12:12-19.
in exactly the same way by any other person.

Pius XII in his Encyclical Letter, *Mystici Corporis* (Mystical Body of Christ) stresses the concept of rank in the Church and the importance of each member when he writes:

... When the Fathers of the Church sing the praises of this Mystical Body of Christ with its ministries, its variety of ranks, its offices, its conditions, its orders, its duties, they are thinking not only of those who have received sacred orders, but of all those, too, who, following the evangelical counsels, pass their lives either actively among men or in the silence of the cloister, or who aim at combining the active and contemplative life according to their Institute. They were thinking of those who, though living in the world, consecrate themselves wholeheartedly to spiritual or corporal works of mercy; as well as those who live in the state of holy matrimony.

Indeed, let this be clearly understood, especially in these our days: the fathers and mothers of families, and those who are spiritual parents through Baptism, and in particular those members of the laity who assist the ecclesiastical Hierarchy in spreading the Kingdom of the Divine Redeemer, occupy an honorable, even though often lowly place in the Christian community. Under the impulse of God with His help they can reach the peak of holiness; and such holiness, Jesus Christ has promised, will never be wanting to the Church.  

So far it has been pointed out that the Oblate is a lay apostle as a result of his Baptism and that his incorporation into a monastic family adds meaning and direction to his apostolate. Now it would be well to con-

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8Pius XII, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.
sider precisely what type of work the Oblate is expected to do in order to fulfill his particular role in the Mystical Body.

It is obvious that the field for apostolic endeavor is extremely broad, ranging in variety from foreign missionary work to apostolic work within the confines of one's own family circle. Just as broad as the field of endeavor is the variety of personnel who labor for the common cause of the Church. The Third Orders, the Legion of Mary, the various Confraternities and pious Unions have all been termed by Pope Pius XI as "providential auxiliaries of Catholic Action." All these have their special work outlined for them by their various organizations. Besides these there are also many souls doing commendable apostolic work as it were "on their own."

The Benedictine Oblate's course of action, however, depends entirely upon the advice and direction of his Oblate Director who acts as a liaison between him and the Abbey of his affiliation, and the work will vary according to the locality and circumstances of the times.


10 Wendell, op. cit., pp. 8, 9.
This procedure is in conformity with the best Benedictine tradition. St. Benedict never designated specific work for his Order as most other founders of Orders did, and thus it is seen that Benedictines are occupied in a variety of activities as the need arises. A quote from Cardinal Newman's *Historical Sketches* serves to clarify this idea of flexibility and timeliness of Benedictinism:

Its spirit indeed is ever one, but not its outward circumstances. It is not an Order proceeding from one mind at a particular date, and appearing all at once in its full perfection, and in its extreme development, and in form one and the same everywhere and from first to last, as is the case with other great religious institutions; but it is an organization, diverse, complex, and irregular, and variously ramified, rich rather than symmetrical, with many origins and centers and new beginnings and the action of local influences, like some great natural growth; with tokens, on the face of it, of its being a divine work, not the mere creation of human genius. Instead of progressing on plan and system and from the will of a superior, it has shot forth and run out as if spontaneously, and has shaped itself according to events, from an irrepressible fulness of life within, and from the energetic self-action of its parts, like those symbolical creatures in the prophet's vision, which "went everyone of them straight forward, whether the impulse of the spirit was to go." It has poured out over the earth, rather than been sent, with a silent mysterious operation, while men slept, and through the romantic adventures of individuals, which are well nigh without record; and thus it has come down to us, not risen up among us, and is found rather than established.\[11\]

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It is not surprising then that the *Manual for Oblates* does not set down specified projects for the lay apostle. First of all, such a procedure would be contrary to the Benedictine tradition. Secondly, many monasteries are dedicated to different types of work which of necessity would determine and differentiate to a great extent the Oblate's work, in so far as he labors for his abbey. Thirdly, the activities of many Oblates—probably the majority—lie within the parish boundaries. Here the layman is subject to obedience to his pastor, and his apostleship falls under his jurisdiction. As long as the Oblate remains sincere to his calling and allows himself to be directed in childlike obedience to his superiors, he need never worry that he is not fulfilling his apostolate. It will make little difference what type of work he is asked to do, whether it be for the monastery, the parish, or the diocese.

The suggestions for the lay apostle in the *Manual* are general and are stated in form of resolutions directed at his personal sanctification.

The resolutions read as follows:

I, therefore, resolve above all to lead a life that will be truly Christ-like. I will practice the charity of Christ towards my neighbors, His brethren, who are united with me to Him in His Mystical
Body. I will frequently read the chapter of the Holy Rule which enumerates the instruments of good works, and I will put them into practice as opportunity offers, both those which will make my own life more beautiful and Christ-like and those which have reference to my neighbor. I will remember that well-ordered charity looks first to those nearest to us—to the members of my group, of my family, of my parish, of my diocese. A Christian apostle is one who is sent by Christ, by His representative. I will, therefore, put myself at the disposal of my spiritual director, of my pastor, of my bishop, of the Abbot of my monastery, that they may direct me and use my services for Christ's cause in any way that they may see fit, so that I may not, by pride and self-will, be led astray. I will be obedient to their directions, even if my own judgment does not approve, convinced that only then will I be truly united with Christ and glorify Him. This is the spirit of my holy Father Benedict: "That in all things God may be glorified."12

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Discussion Topics for Lesson V:

1. Read Pope Pius XII's Encyclical, The Mystical Body of Christ and discuss it at your next Oblate meeting.

2. Discuss the potentialities of the lay apostolate within your particular parish.

3. What types of work do the monks of the monastery of your affiliation do? Do they need your help in any way?

4. Explain the difference between the work of a lay apostle associated with an organization and that of a lay person doing charity on his own?

5. What are some of the dangers of apostolic work done without the direction of a superior?

READINGS:

The Mystical Body of Christ (Encyclical), Pope Pius XII.
This Tremendous Lover, Fr. M. Eugene Boylan, O.Cist.R.
A Map of Life, F. J. Sheed.
Many Are One, Leo J. Trese.
The Ideal Parishioner, Rev. John S. Spence.
The Lay Apostle; after the Heart of St. Benedict, Rev. Norbert Schachinger, O.S.B.
The Dignity of the Parishioner, Rev. Bernard Sause, O.S.B.
LESSON VI

THE MASS—THE CROWNING ACT OF THE LITURGY

Active participation in the most holy mysteries and in the solemn public prayer of the Church is the primary and indispensable source of the true Christian spirit.

Saint Pius X.

A Christian's life and apostolic work will be successful and bear fruit only in proportion to his understanding and application of the principles of the sacred liturgy in his life.

For many, the very word "liturgy" is a stumbling block, yet, its meaning can be expressed simply as "the Mystical Body at prayer,"¹ or as, "Christ and all Christians at prayer."²

Expanding the definition, Father Rooney, S.J., in his work Light on the Liturgy says:

It is Christ continuing on earth in His Mystical Body—precisely as a body—the worship He once gave to His Father in and through His own physical, Mary-given body.

It is the public official worship of God by the Mystical Body as a "body"; the worship by which is carried out the Christ-given mission to glorify the


Triune God and to save and sanctify souls.  

Pope Pius XII in his Encyclical, *Mediator Dei*, defines the Liturgy as

... the public worship which our Redeemer as Head of the Church renders to the Father as well as the worship which the community of the faithful renders to its Founder, and through Him to the Heavenly Father. It is, in short, the worship rendered by the Mystical Body of Christ in the entirety of its Head and members.

The public worship of God under the term "liturgy" includes the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the Divine Office, the Sacraments, the liturgical year, and various processions and blessings—in fact, anything that pertains to the Church's worship.

This lesson, however, will be confined to a brief consideration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the crowning act of the liturgy, with emphasis on the need for corporate worship and active participation of the members of the Mystical Body in union with Christ their Head.

The Mystical Body of Christ is obviously a social union and, consequently, incorporation into this Body connotes social responsibilities between the Head

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3Rooney, op. cit., p. 23.

and the members and also between the members themselves. Each has a particular contribution to make to the well-being of the whole Body. If one fails in his responsibility or contribution, if one proves to be unfaithful to his calling, the result will be a diminution of the honor and glory of God in His members.  

St. Paul says, "If one member suffereth, all the members suffer therewith."  

This truth should serve as a forceful incentive to all Christians to perform their daily duties, whatever they may be, to the best of their abilities knowing that in so doing they add to the greater honor and glory of God.  

From the social implications inherent in the Mystical Body, one readily perceives the need for unity and solidarity of members who are both naturally and supernaturally dependent first on their Head, Christ, and then on one another.  

This unity rules out all forms of individualism in public corporate worship. As Archbishop J. F. Rummel, in addressing the National Council of Catholic Women expressed:

Individualism shrivels up men's souls and robs them

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5Ellard, op. cit., p. 380. 6I Cor. 12:26.
of the glorious opportunity of sharing in the full life of the Church and enjoying the exhilarating sensation of passing forward the stream of life blood and energy to the other members of the Mystical Body.

Christians find solidarity and reciprocal communication of life in the very heart of the liturgy, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Pius XII speaks of the Mass as the symbol of unity when he writes:

Through the Eucharistic Sacrifice Christ our Lord wished to give special evidence to the Faithful of our union among ourselves and with our Divine Head, marvelous as it is and beyond all praise. For here the sacred ministers act in the person not only of Our Saviour but of the whole Mystical Body and of everyone of the Faithful. In this act of sacrifice through the hands of the priest, whose word alone has brought the Immaculate Lamb to be present on the altar, the Faithful themselves with one desire and one prayer offer it to the Eternal Father—the most acceptable victim of praise and propitiation for the Church's universal needs. And just as the Divine Redeemer, dying on the Cross, offered Himself as Head of the whole human race to the Eternal Father, so "in this pure oblation" He offers not only Himself as Head of the Church to the heavenly Father, but in Himself His mystical members as well. He embraces them all, even the weak and ailing ones, in the tenderest love of His Heart.

Mass is an action of all the faithful. It is an action done together, a corporate action by which the

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7Ellard, op. cit., p. 382. (Citing Archbishop J. F. Rummel).

8Pius XII, Mystici Corporis (New York: The America Press, 1943), pp. 35-36.
faithful offer themselves in union with Christ to God the Father in behalf of themselves and others. It is from this united action in the Mass, moreover, that Christians derive the graces necessary to perpetuate Christ's cause in the world about them long after the Mass has ended. The Mass is in a word, the fountainhead, the very source of all action carried on by the lay apostle.

Msgr. Hillenbrand, speaking at the 16th National Liturgical Week, expressed the idea of the continuation of the action of the Mass into the lay apostolate when he said:

The lay apostle, through a sense of the Mystical Body, intensified at Mass, must have a strong conviction that where he is, Christ is; Christ on the assembly line; Christ in the office; Christ on the dock; Christ on the coal-face because he is there; Christ in fields; Christ in the polling booth. The spirit, the impelling force of the lay apostolate may be summed up in one phrase, my indispensability to the work of Christ. This gives immense meaning to a short, brief life which otherwise one would be tempted to regard as lost in the world's immensity.

If solidarity and unity are to be found in the

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10Ibid., pp. 179-180.
Holy Sacrifice of the Mass and if an intimate union is to exist between the priest and the people during Mass causing grace to overflow into one's daily life, there must, of necessity, be a unified form of prayer to be used by all. The faithful must no longer isolate themselves from the members of their great Christian family by slavishly and selfishly adhering to their own private devotions during the holy Sacrifice.

... They should not be praying to our Lady when God's message is being announced to them; they should not be praying to St. Anthony when the priest is putting the meaning into the gifts; they should not be making a novena to St. Maria Goretti when the priest is offering the Victim; they should not be praying for the souls in purgatory when the priest is receiving or distributing the return-gift of the sacrifice.

Behaving like that brings confusion and disorder into the unity of the act of worship; it turns it from communal action which it ought to be into the simultaneous performance of a lot of disparate individual devotions. All the things which these people are doing may be good in themselves; it is good to pray to our Lady, to the saints, and for the souls in purgatory. But these private prayers should be done in private time, not during the public celebration of the community sacrifice.¹¹

The spirit of individualism displayed by the performance of various and sundry devotions of the faithful as each says "his own prayers" during the Mass, apart from the priest at the altar, must give way to the spirit

of corporateness which can only be realized by the use of the missal, the Church's own prescribed prayer book. All of the needs of the faithful, both as individuals and as unified members of the Mystical Body of Christ are contained in these prayers of the Church.

The prayers said at Mass (Missal) are the warmest outpourings of the Church's heart, in the most sublime act of worship which earth offers to heaven. No words can exaggerate their beauty, nor the reverent tenderness they display for God's Majesty. Every feeling of the heart finds adequate expression in her supplications, as she mourns, and rejoices, thanks, beseeches, and invokes her God. These prayers are preserved from error; they are consecrated by age; they teach us how to pray as no other prayer can.12

The climax of active participation of the faithful in communal Mass-worship is, of course, reception of the Body and Blood of Christ. Through the nourishment of the Holy Eucharist Christ continues to live in and work through His members. Holy Communion furnishes the life-giving nourishment of divine grace to members of the Mystical Body.

It cannot be emphasized too much that the Church, the parish and the individual Christian can be sacramentally renewed only through the Eucharist. Church, parish and individual Christians can be made healthy only from the altar outward, from the Mass—from the full Mass that includes Communion.

of the congregation. Here is parochial and pastoral activity in the fullest sense of the word.13

Donald Attwater in an article, "A Layman Looks at the Liturgy," sums up in a brief paragraph the general idea of this lesson on the Mass.

The Christian life (which includes eating and love-making and playing baseball as well as prayer and almsdeeds) is compounded of an individual life and a corporate life; that corporate life consists eventually of a mystical union with Jesus Christ and with our fellow Christians on earth, in purgatory and in heaven; and that mystical union is objectified on a small scale whenever a number of individuals assist together at the corporate meal, the Sacrifice of the Mass. To assist in the fullest possible way at that sacrament of unity one must receive Holy Communion and at once the whole of one's personal moral life is involved, for to receive Holy Communion it is necessary to be in a state of grace, in peace and charity with one's neighbors, determined to do one's best, no more to offend them or otherwise to deny God.14

If the Mass and the use of the Missal are not occupying the predominant place in the life of each Oblate, if private prayers and special devotions are being preferred to the prescribed liturgical prayers recommended by the Church, let the Oblate revamp his spiritual exercises according to a hierarchy of values, putting first things first, so that his life and apostolate

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14Donald Attwater, "A Layman Looks at Liturgy," Orate Fratres, X (October, 1936), 532.
will bear more spiritual fruit. In a word, let the life of the layman become less self-centered and more Christ-centered.
Discussion Topics for Lesson VI:

1. Before discussion about the Mass, check to see how many Oblates take an active part in the Mass by using a daily Missal.

2. If the majority of Oblates do not use a daily Missal, direct the discussion towards the possibility of starting the practice.

3. Special instructions should be given to those who wish to adopt the Missal for daily use.

4. Led by the Oblate Director, the oblates should make a thorough study of the Mass.

5. Study the prayers of the Missal to see how they meet every need of the Oblate.

The subject of the Mass and the use of the Missal will afford study matter for several meetings.

READINGS:

(for study purposes) Christian Life and Worship by Rev. Gerald Ellard, S.J.

Liturgy: The Life of the Church by Dom Lambert Beauduin, O.S.B.

Of Sacraments and Sacrifice by Rev. Clifford Howell, S.J.


Light on the Liturgy by Richard L. Rooney, S.J.

The Mass of the Future by Gerald Ellard, S.J.


The Liturgy of the Mass by Pius Parsch.

Study the Mass by Pius Parsch.
LESSON VII

THE DIVINE OFFICE--THE OFFICIAL PRAYER
OF THE CHURCH

"Let nothing be preferred to the Work of God."
The Rule.

Christ taught His disciples to pray. Furthermore, He commanded them to "pray always." The Divine Office, with the Sacrifice of the Mass as its center, is the perfect fulfillment of this command. Together they form a complete cycle of praise and worship extending from hour to hour throughout the liturgical year.

The Divine Office, which is the official prayer of the Church, is a perfect complement of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, a continuation, as it were, of the prayers of the Church offered to God the Father in the name of the faithful and in union with His divine Son.

Once the Christian grasps the full significance of the doctrine of the Mystical Body of Christ, and begins to feel the real impact of this doctrine on his own life, making him a vital and living member of the

Church, the more he will begin to comprehend the need for and the advantages of surrendering himself completely to the corporate prayer of Holy Mother Church.

Much of what has been learned in Lesson VI about the Mass can be applied to the study of the Divine Office because, as Msgr. Martin B. Hellriegel, an authority on the Church's liturgy, says, "The divine Office is the sacred framework, the garment of the Mass. The two belong together, as garment and body belong together, both as to text and to form."3

Just as the Christian draws inner strength from the life-giving waters of the Eucharist in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, which enables him to carry on his apostolate in the world, so is his work sanctified and vivified throughout the day by the nourishing effects of the constant prayer of the Divine Office.

In a few chosen words Msgr. Hellriegel elaborates this close relationship of Mass and Office and the sacraments and their effect on the Christian. He says:

The blessed Passion of Jesus Christ is the divine

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Wellspring of all life, peace and joy. From this divine Wellspring gush forth seven streams for the glory of God and the sanctification of men of good will. The mightiest of these streams is the Holy Eucharist, our daily Sacrifice and Food. This eucharistic stream is the center of the other sacraments, giving them meaning, life, freshness, and beauty. Around these streams the Church, under the guidance of God's Spirit, has planted a hedge, the divine Office, which from the irrigating waters of the eucharistic stream receives such vitality and strength that it will bring forth fragrant blossoms for the honor of God and sweet fruit for the holiness of God's children, making them ever more "a chosen generation, a kingly priesthood, a holy nation, a purchased people" (I Peter 3), who by their love for the most High Eucharist, their love for the life-giving sacraments and their love for the divine Office will become most fruitful branches of Christ, the Vine.  

St. Benedict, as stated in Lesson III, devoted no less than thirteen full chapters of his Rule to the subject of the Divine Office, calling it the "work of God" (Opus Dei) some twenty-three times, and stressing its importance to his family of monks by legislating that nothing was to be preferred to it.  

From what has been said, therefore, it is quite obvious that the Divine Office is preeminent as the Church's highest form of corporate worship, more pleasing

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4 Ibid., p. 129.


6 The Rule, op. cit., p. 68.
to Almighty God than any other form of prayer, with the exception of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

The primary purpose of this particular Lesson is to whet the spiritual appetite of the Oblate and predispose him to investigate the possibilities of adopting the prayers of the Office as the basic source of his spiritual progress.

Although a study of the Office as to historical background, content and type of Office to be adopted by the layman, is quite impossible here, it is presumed that the Oblate under the guidance of his Director will pursue this knowledge by reading and studying from the selections suggested in the bibliography at the end of this lesson, with the serious idea of making the Divine Office his daily companion.

For the most part, the Divine Office is not the most popular form of prayer, as far as the layman is concerned. People do not tend to love that with which they are unfamiliar. There are so many vague and misconstrued notions surrounding the Office that a great deal of time and energy must first be expended in order to break down these ungrounded ideas before wholesale participation in this corporate praise can be realized within the Church.

For instance, the layman must be made to see that
the Office is not exclusively a prayer for the Clergy and religious, as most people are prone to believe. When he studies the historical background of the Office, the layman will see that although the Office is confided to special men and women (priests and religious) to be performed under pain of serious sin, it is mainly to insure its daily recitation and not to exclude anyone else from saying it. 7

The layman should be made cognizant of the fact that the Office, by its social nature, is a public, corporate form of praise ideally recited in a group with other members of the Mystical Body of Christ. Even when one is forced by circumstances, as is most often the case, to pray the Office privately, the prayer, none the less, remains a public prayer. In this situation the person should unite himself in spirit to those more fortunate persons who are able to say the Office in choir according to the mind of the Church. The Oblate, by virtue of his assimilation into the monastic family, shares in a more intimate way this union with the prayers of the monks.

The same unselfish attitude that should pervade

the layman's participation in the Sacrifice of the Mass by his use of the Missal should carry over into his prayer life throughout the day. There is no more room for self-centeredness in the Office than in the Mass, and this is the area that causes many Christians to falter along the way. They fail to see that all of their desires, sorrows, joys, indeed all their temporal and spiritual needs are embodied in the prayers of the divine Psalmody and can be better realized in the prayers of the universal Church than in their own private devotions. They find it most difficult to sacrifice the prayers of their own choosing to the more profound words of Christ Himself. Would that the faithful could grasp the idea of one author writing of the Office.

It is the cry of the whole human race to God, in all its joys and sufferings, its triumphs and humiliations, its strength and weakness. And we both join in this cry, making it in some sort our own, and at the same time stand before God as intercessors for all who oppress and are oppressed.8

These are just a few of the problems which confront the layman when he begins to consider adopting the Divine Office as his way of prayer.

Material concerning this particular topic could well occupy many hours of discussion and it is hoped

that no Oblate Director will by-pass the great opportunity to instill a deep love and understanding of the liturgy into the hearts of the Oblates under his charge so that in the not too distant future, all things will be restored in Christ, and it may be said that

the whole world seems to have become a temple wherein from daylight into darkness, and from darkness unto dawn, voices without number repeat unanimously and without varying, the same accents of adoration, of praise and supplication.\textsuperscript{9}

\textsuperscript{9}"The Divine Office," \textit{The Placidian, II} (April, 1925), 28.
Discussion Topics for Lesson VII:

1. Discuss the merits of the prayers contained in the Divine Office to private personal prayer of a less liturgical nature.

2. From the instructions of your Director and your own personal reading show why prayers of Lauds and Vespers should be preferred to Prime and Compline.

3. The Church advocates the saying of the Divine Office by laymen. In so doing does she condemn the private devotions of the faithful? Show the relationship between private and public prayer.

4. Discuss the possibilities of forming a group to recite a part of the Office publicly—daily—weekly or monthly as seems feasible.

5. Consider, with your Director, the feasibility of having Sunday Vespers in your parish Church.

READINGS:

The Psalms by Msgr. Charles J. Callan, O.P.

The Psalms, A Prayerbook, edited by Rev. William McClelan, S.J.

Towards Loving the Psalms by Rev. Cyril Charlie Martin-dale, S.J.

Speaking of How to Pray by Mary Perkins, Obl., O.S.B.

Liturgical Worship by Rev. Joseph Jungmann, S.J.

The Breviary and the Laity by Rodolphe Hoornaert.

A Short Breviary by Monks of St. John's Abbey.

Christ in the Liturgy by Dom Illtyd Trethowan.

The Development of Christian Worship by Dom Benedict Steuart, O.S.B.

The Breviary Explained by Pius Parsch.
LESSON VIII

THE OBLATE'S NEED FOR SPIRITUAL READING
AND MEDITATION

"The more we read the Gospel, the stronger our faith becomes."

Pope Pius X.

Stress has been laid on the Oblate's obligation of being a lay apostle. It has been pointed out that the Mass and the Sacraments are the chief sources of grace for his apostolic work. Suggested liturgical prayers, especially those in the Missal, and parts of the Divine Office suited to the Oblate's particular needs, have been highly recommended as forms of prayer most pleasing to God after the Mass itself.

Surely this is as much time as the layman can afford to spend in prayer if he is to attend to the obligations that are binding upon him by his station in life. And yet there is mention of spiritual reading and meditation, both highly commendable practices for the layman who truly seeks God.

As the Oblate begins then to make way in his busy daily life for a set period of time for spiritual reading and meditation, he may begin at the same time to wonder just what is the precise difference between priestly or religious spirituality and that of the lay-
man.

Basically there is no difference. Both have a definite role to play in carrying on the work of redemption, begun by Christ on the Cross. The difference in the work and prayer life of each is determined by the particular vocation one follows.

... Christian life takes on a definite pattern according to the demands of the part we are called to play in the drama of redemption. So with the priest, the Christian's life takes on a definite shape or pattern determined by his vocation.¹

The end marked out for all is the same—eternal salvation—but the means for attaining the end are numerous and varied.

That our prayer should become a real knowledge of God and something more than holy thought and desires is not dependent on whether or not we live a life in the world or in the cloister but on a holy resolution to seek God, to find Him and to purify our souls that we may see Him; and on the divine assistance which surely comes to the one who sets his face to journey on to Christ to the glory of His kingdom.²

The primary purpose of these instructions is to assist the Oblate in mapping out for himself an integrated and well-balanced Christian life of prayer and

¹Dennis J. Geaney, O.S.A., "Some Notes on Lay Spirituality," Worship, XXVI, No. 3 (February, 1952), 114.

²Thomas Verner Moore, O.S.B., "The Benedictine Tradition of Mental Prayer," The Placidian, III, No. 3 (July, 1926), 188.
work—ora et labora—to make the work of his salvation and apostolate easier and purposeful, not to frustrate him by burdening him with a number of isolated meaningless hours of prayer to be "gotten in" before or after his working hours.

Christ Himself is the best example for the busy layman. During Christ's three years of public ministry here on earth, His time was completely occupied with preaching and teaching so that He often had to hide Himself or spend the night in solitude in order to pour out His soul to His heavenly Father in formal prayer.

St. Benedict's spiritual philosophy makes sense to the busy Oblate, also. Benedict wrote his Rule for monks who seem to have been as busy in their day as people living in the twentieth century. Monks worked in the kitchen, the bakery, the mill, or in the fields. Manuscripts were copied by others, reading and chant were studied by still others, and young Oblates had to be regularly instructed.³ St. Benedict, nevertheless, provided room in the day's busy schedule for long periods of "divine reading" and the study of things spiritual.⁴ He realized that men's reading habits vitally

³Deutsch, op. cit., p. 360. ⁴Ibid., p. 235.
affect their living habits because reading results first in thinking and ultimately in acting.

Venerable Blosius enumerates other advantages of spiritual reading. He says:

The mind of a good man derives many admirable gains from spiritual doctrine. It is kept pure from sin; it ceases to be ignorant; it obtains tranquility; it is strengthened; and it is rendered beautiful.5

Although spiritual reading occupies a special place in St. Benedict's horarium, he does not outline a specific time, place, or form for meditation as we think of it today. In Chapter IV of the Rule he lists as the fifty-sixth and fifty-seventh instruments of good works, "To listen willingly to holy reading" and "To devote oneself frequently to prayer."6

This sequence would lead one to believe that the holy Patriarch took it for granted, more or less, that meditation would follow naturally upon the period spent in holy reading. Further evidence for the validity of this supposition appears in St. Benedict's words insisting that the monk's whole life should be a life of prayer and that he should live in a continuous consciousness of


6Rule, op. cit., p. 18.
the divine presence of God.

Dom Thomas Verner Moore, O.S.B., in an article about meditation for Oblates stresses this same idea.

Set methods of meditation though useful, are not the natural way of gaining those spiritual illuminations that the mind needs in order to lead a spiritual life. We work our way naturally to meditation by reading and pondering on the thought of that which is read. It is at the outset a purely intellectual exercise which may be carried on by anyone who is able to read and understand in some measure the book he is reading. Meditation naturally commences as meditative spiritual reading. One who develops it naturally in this way need not come to that discouraging blankness in which a person sits down with the general intention of thinking about something and finds the mind wandering at once to the difficulties and frivolities of the day.7

Whether or not one will follow St. Benedict's plan for meditation or a more definite and systematic plan as advocated by St. Francis de Sales in his Introduction to a Devout Life, or St. Ignatius' Spiritual Exercises, will depend upon the individual. What works well for one may be a complete failure for another. Regardless of the method used, the end result of meditation should be a greater love of God, the making of holy resolutions to overcome one's faults, and an ever growing consciousness of the divine presence of God resulting in the making of holy aspirations many times through-

7Thomas Verner Moore, O.S.B., "Meditation," The Placidian, III, No. 2 (April, 1926), 118.
out the day. "The voice of God is like the whistling of a gentle air and only one who has learned to pray can be conscious of it in the busy marts of life."\(^8\)

The time for spiritual reading and meditation will also have to be determined by each Oblate according to different circumstances. Some will find it more profitable, indeed a necessity, to reserve a specified time for these exercises while others will deem it more convenient and to their liking to utilize odd moments, at work, while waiting for meals, riding to and from work, or various other times in the day. The main idea is that one be conscientious and regular so that in a short time the practice of spiritual reading will become so much a part of one's life that the time element will no longer pose a serious problem. People usually find time for the things they really want to do.

As for the type of reading to be done, one could make numerous suggestions and still not meet the needs of every Oblate. The Oblate Director is best qualified to provide reading materials or make suitable recommendations for the individuals under his care.

Frank S. Sheed, in a pamphlet entitled *Ground Plan for Catholic Reading*, lists a variety of readings

\(^8\)Ibid., p. 124.
which will prove helpful to the layman. He mentions that there are certain books that cannot be substituted. The Holy Bible, of course, heads the list. Mr. Sheed says:

The Gospels are indispensable. No life of Our Lord written since can be a substitute: the gospels draw on a personal companionship with Christ as He lived for which no later degree of scholarship or sanctity can compensate.9

Other suggested good readings may be found in The Oblate Library Catalogue published by St. John's Abbey, Collegeville, Minnesota, and St. Meinrad's Archabbey, St. Meinrad, Indiana.

It is taken for granted that each Oblate regularly reads his diocesan newspaper and subscribes to and reads one or more Catholic periodicals.

Above all else, let the Oblate realize that the special assistance of God is needed if he is to approach a condition in which he abides in the continuous realization of the presence of God, and if he is to lead a life of recollection amid the distractions of the world. He should often and earnestly petition God's help along the way to perfection.

Therefore, when we have done what we can by our own efforts and nevertheless find that overpowering distractions are rushing in upon us we should cry out: "O God, come to my assistance!" O Lord, make haste to help me."10


10Moore, op. cit., p. 124.
Discussion Topics for Lesson VIII:

1. What is the difference between spiritual reading and meditation?

2. Discuss different methods of meditation with the view of adopting the one which seems suitable to your needs.

3. Do you think it better to have a designated time for your spiritual exercises, or would you rather work them in at various times throughout your day's schedule?

4. Discuss some topics that you consider good subjects for meditation.

5. Try to cultivate the habit of saying ejaculatory prayers many times throughout the day.

READINGS:

The Bible.


The Imitation of Christ by Thomas a' Kempis.

Readings suggested by the Oblate Director.
The following lesson contains an assortment of practices, devotions, and information pertinent to those who are in any way affiliated with the Benedictine way of life. The material has been taken, for the most part, from leaflets supplied by various Benedictine Monasteries or Convents and may be had by anyone who wishes to write for additional copies.

The Benedictine Medal

This information about the Benedictine Medal is taken from a leaflet entitled, "The Jubilee Medal of St. Benedict," which is printed by the Benedictine Convent of Perpetual Adoration, Clyde, Missouri. Similar leaflets regarding the medal may be obtained from any Abbey Press.

No medal possesses a more wonderful power, and none is more highly esteemed by Holy Church than the Medal of St. Benedict. Marvelous is the aid which the St. Benedict Medal affords to its devout wearers in the manifold necessities of soul and body. On this account the Medal is well known and widely used throughout the Christian world; everywhere it is regarded as a highly favored object of devotion. Furthermore, numerous plenary indulgences are connected with the wearing of this Medal.

Origin and Explanation of the Medal

St. Benedict (born at Nursia, Italy, in 480) had
a profound veneration for the holy Cross and for our Savior Crucified. In virtue of the Sign of the Cross, he wrought many miracles and exercised great power over the spirits of darkness. In consequence of the great veneration in which St. Benedict was held from the early Middle Ages, a Medal was struck, one side of which represents St. Benedict holding the Cross in one hand and the Holy Rule in the other. Around the image of St. Benedict are these words in Latin: "May his presence protect us in the hour of death." St. Benedict has ever been the patron of the dying, because of the circumstances attending his own most glorious death, for he breathed forth his soul while standing in prayer before the Most Blessed Sacrament.

The reverse of the Medal shows the image of the Cross. Around the margin are the initials of Latin words which form verses supposed to have originated with the holy Father Benedict himself. The English translation is: "Begone Satan! Suggest not to me thy vain things. The cup thou profferest me is evil; drink thou thy poison." In the angles formed by the arms of the Cross are the letters C.S.P.B.,signifying, "Cross of the holy Father Benedict." The letters on the Cross itself have this meaning: "May the holy Cross be my light; let not the dragon be my guide."

Power and Efficacy of the Medal

The pious use of the St. Benedict Medal has become for many a source of graces and blessings.

1. The Medal is powerful in obtaining for sinners the grace of conversion.
2. It obtains protection and aid for persons tormented by the evil spirit, and in temptations against holy purity.
3. It procures assistance in the hour of death.
4. It has often proved an efficacious remedy for bodily ills, and a means of protection against contagious diseases.
5. The Medal possesses special power to destroy witchcraft and other diabolical influences.
6. It secures for expectant mothers special assistance from heaven.
7. Frequently this Medal has been found to be a marvelous protection against fire, tempests and storms on land and sea.
8. Even domestic animals have been visibly aided by it when infected with disease or plague.

The Medal Richly Indulgenced

The St. Benedict Medal can be blessed only by a priest having the special faculty for conferring this blessing. In three long and solemn prayers, the Church prays God that all who devoutly wear this Medal and strive to perform good works, may obtain health of body and soul, escape the snares and deceptions of the devil, and may once appear holy and stainless in His sight.

Plenary Indulgences

The St. Benedict Medal has been enriched with numerous partial and plenary indulgences. Already in the year 1048 Leo IX granted extraordinary privileges for the pious use of the St. Benedict Medal. Later on, Popes Benedict XIV, Gregory XVI, Pius IX and Pius X enriched it with many and great indulgences.

Blessing of St. Maurus

In addition to the following information concerning the St. Maurus blessing which is contained in a leaflet entitled, "Blessing of St. Maurus," published by St. John's Abbey Press, Collegeville, Minnesota, is the life of St. Maurus and an account of his gift of miracles.

Due to the fact that St. Maurus miraculously freed many persons from their bodily afflictions through the sign of the cross and the relic of the true cross of Christ, in many monasteries of the

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1The Jubilee Medal of St. Benedict (Clyde, Missouri: Benedictine Convent of Perpetual Adoration, n.d.).
Order of St. Benedict, from time immemorial, after the example of this miracle-worker, the custom of blessing the sick with the relic of the true cross, has prevailed, in order to restore their health. But until recent years, there was no uniform and approved formula of blessing of the Church. There existed a number of old and new formulas, which were essentially the same, but differed from each other in many details. Some formulas were exceedingly lengthy. In the face of these facts, the Rt. Rev. Dom Maurus Wolter, O.S.B., President of the Beuronese Congregation, petitioned Rome for an approved and authentic formula. A carefully prepared and much abbreviated formula was therefore presented to the Sacred Congregation of Rites for its approval. This formula was approved by the Sacred Congregation on May 4, 1882, for the use of all priests of the Order of St. Benedict. The Abbots President, moreover, of the different Benedictine Congregations of Black Monks, enjoy the faculty of delegating secular as well as regular priests to impart the blessing, provided the formula approved by the Sacred Congregation is used. It is given here below both in English and Latin, but can also be found in the Roman Ritual (Appendix, Bened. Propriae, n. 42).

Efficacy of the Blessing

The blessing of St. Maurus has its efficacy through the power of the sign of the cross, the veneration of the Relic of the true cross of our Redeemer, the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Benedict and St. Maurus, and the blessing of the Church. Innumerable facts attest that where the blessing of St. Maurus has been received with a lively faith, sincere contrition, and firm confidence in God, persons have been relieved of their bodily ills, sicknesses have been cured, and evident miracles have been wrought.

Form of the Blessing

(Before the blessing is imparted, the Relic of the true Cross of our Lord is exposed, at least two candles having been lit. Acts of contrition and firm confidence should then be excited in the sick person, so that through the merits and intercession of St. Benedict and St. Maurus, if it should please
God, health may be obtained. Three Our Fathers and as many Hail Marys and Glory be to the Father are recited in honor of the Blessed Trinity. Then a priest of the Order of St. Benedict, or any priest delegated, having put on a red stole, and with his right hand holding up the Relic of the Sacred Cross before the sick person, says the prayers in Latin as given below after the following English translation:

V. Benediction, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, honor and power and strength to our God for ever and ever.
R. Amen.
V. My foot hath stood in the direct way.
R. In the churches I will bless Thee, O Lord.

Invocation

Through the invocation of the most holy name of the Lord may that faith, in which St. Maurus, by employing the words that follow, healed the sick, and in which I, though an unworthy sinner, utter the selfsame words, restore your health as you desire:

In the name of the most holy and undivided Trinity, and supported by the merits of the most holy Father Benedict, I bid you, N.N., to rise, stand upon your feet, and be cured, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

(Antiphon.) Surely he hath borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows: by his bruises we are healed.

V. He that forgiveth the iniquities of men.
R. May he heal thy infirmities.
V. O Lord, hear my prayer.
R. And let my cry come unto Thee.
V. The Lord be with you.
R. And with Thy spirit.

Let us pray

O God the Creator of all things, who didst ordain that Thy only Son should take flesh of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Ghost for the restoration of mankind and didst deign to heal the wounds and infirmities of our souls by the redemption accomplished upon the sacred and glorious wood of the life-giving Cross: do then also vouchsafe through this powerful sign to restore health to this thy servant N. Through the same Christ our Lord.
R. Amen.
Let us pray

Lord Jesus Christ, who didst confer upon my master blessed Benedict the privilege of obtaining from Thee whatsoever he might ask in Thy name; vouchsafe, through his intercession, to heal all the infirmities of this Thy servant: in order that being restored to health, he (she) may give thanks to Thy holy name, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost for ever and ever. R. Amen.

(Blessing)

Through the invocation of the Immaculate Mother of God and ever Virgin Mary, and the intercession of Saints Benedict and Maurus, may the Power of God the Father, the Wisdom of God the Son, and the Strength of the Holy Ghost free thee from the infirmities. Amen.

May God's holy will be done, and may it be done unto you as you wish and pray, for the praise and honor of the Most Holy Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. (The priest then blesses the sick man with the Relic of the Cross saying:)

May the blessing of Almighty God, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost descend upon thee and abide with thee forever. R. Amen.

(The sick person then kisses the Relic.

This blessing, if need be, is repeated three times, either on different days, or on the same day, as it may be deemed necessary. Also three votive Masses may be celebrated, namely in honor of the Passion, of St. Maurus, Abbot, and for the Poor Souls, otherwise the Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in three different parts, according to the aforesaid intentions, will be recited by the sick person, or he may have it recited.)

Saint Frances of Rome

Saint Frances of Rome, 1384-1440, is considered as one of the greatest mystics of the 15th century and is honored as patroness of Benedictine Oblates.

Early in her youth she desired to enter religion but at her father's request she renounced her own wishes and became the wife of Lorenze de' Ponziani at the age of twelve.

Although God favored her with the gift of absorbing prayer, she lived by the axiom that, "a wife is bound to leave her devotion at the altar and to find God in her household work."\(^3\)

Frances was remarkable for her charity to the poor and for her zeal for souls. She was influential in winning many of the Roman women from a life of frivolity and idleness and began an association of Oblates later known as the Benedictine Oblate Congregation of Tor di Specchi which was approved by Eugene IV, July 4, 1433.

The members led a religious life, but did not take vows or adhere to the strict cloister. They spent their time in praying and performing acts of charity.\(^4\)

After 1414 she received her husband's consent to live a life of continency, and advanced rapidly in a life of spiritual contemplation. She had the gift of


miracles and ecstasy and lived in perpetual communication with her guardian angel.\(^5\)

Her most outstanding characteristics were her humility and detachment, obedience and patience.

After forty years of happy married life, her husband died and she retired among her Oblates at Tor di' Specchi to govern the community she had founded.

On the occasion of a visit to her son she became ill and died on the day she had foretold, March 9, 1440.

Saint Henry II, Emperor

Saint Henry II, (972-1024) is venerated as the special patron of Oblates. This German King and Roman Emperor was born at Abback Castle on the Danube in Lower Bavaria, May 6, 973; he was the last German king of the Saxon house, the son of Duke Henry the Wrangler of Bavaria. Destined in youth for the priesthood, he became acquainted with ecclesiastical interests but in 1002, on the death of Otto III, he was elected emperor.

In this position as Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, he was weighed down with the burden of worldly affairs, yet he proved to be a great lover of the Bene-

\(^5\)Holweck, op. cit., p. 396.
dictines. In 1014 he went to Rome and received the imperial crown at the hands of Pope Benedict VIII. He also received from Pope Benedict the imperial globe mounted with a cross and four jewels, which he later dispatched to Cluny, a celebrated French Benedictine monastery, with the words: "Who are more worthy to receive these insignia than they who have trampled the world under their feet in order to imitate the Savior?"²

He himself wished to abdicate and retire to a monastery, but yielded to the advice of the Abbot of Verdun, and retained his dignity.

He and his wife, St. Cunegunda, lived in perpetual chastity, to which they had bound themselves by vow. The saint made numerous pious foundations, gave liberally to institutions of various kinds and built the cathedral of Bomberg. His holy death occurred in 1024 and he is venerated by the Church on July 15.⁷

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⁶Ibid., p. 470.

CONCLUSION

The objectives set forth in the Introduction to this thesis have been accomplished within the nine lessons contained in this course of study for Oblates. The information contained in the lessons, the questions at the ends of the lessons, and the suggested readings, provide a broad framework of instruction to be used in any number of different ways by the Oblate Director according to the particular needs of the Oblate novice under his care for the period of one year.

When a plan of monthly meetings is followed, the adaptation of the lessons may be arranged so that those which seem to warrant greater emphasis may be studied over a longer period of time, while those of less importance may be covered in one meeting.

The lesson plan is flexible enough, so that when no plan of formal instruction is provided, the lessons may be used as a guide to the Oblate novice, independent of a director, in his attempt to study systematically the principles under which he desires to develop his spiritual life.

The writer feels that this study plan will provide the novice with the essential information and in-
spiration which he will need in order to understand the Benedictine Oblation and attain the ideal for which he is striving.
Dear Sister Mary Jane

Your kind letter of January 1 has been on my desk for a week or more. It must have an answer. Yes, I am very busy, but I am also deeply interested in the Secular Oblates of St. Benedict.

After stepping aside from the active management of our Archabbey, I considered as one possible occupation, the developing of the Oblate Idea along more definite plans. At present it is unformed and vague, a hodge-podge, hit-and-miss procedure. Our Abbey has done much to foster the movement. But it needs to be better planned. My hope was to get our own Oblates so well organized that it would serve as a pattern for other Abbeys and then for a nation-wide movement of good work. It seems to me that the Oblates could be used as the ideal means of fostering Catholic Action among the laity. They could be the phalanx of lay persons carrying on the Benedictine Ideals in the world through the lanes and ranks of lay persons.

I had in mind working out a series of printed lessons. As soon as a person had been invested as an Oblate Novice, he would get his first lesson. Every two weeks he would get another printed lesson. These would be punched on the left side so that they could be tied together and kept in a folder for later reference. The twenty-five lessons would end shortly before the end of the year of novitiate. Before making final Oblation this Novice would know very clearly what he is and what he is trying to be and do as an Oblate of St. Benedict.

On a separate sheet you will find listed the twenty-five subjects of the lessons that would serve to instruct the Novices. This list is only tentative. It was a rough jotting that I made with the aid of a very fine Oblate from Indianapolis, an attorney friend of mine.
In the course of history whole Abbeys have been founded to foster one specific work. For example, St. Jerome's Abbey in Rome, to discover the true Vulgate according to St. Jerome. How about an Abbey to systematize Oblate Work? The Benedictine Order could be a great influence in the world THROUGH THE OBLATES. They could influence the family, the parish, the town or city, with the ideals of St. Benedict. The Oblates could become Apostles of the Holy Father's encyclicals through learning and action.

Oblates could be a fine influence in a parish. Many secular priests now look askance at Religious and frown down on third orders. The Oblates could learn loyalty to the Holy Father, to the Bishop, to the Pastor. Oblates could be among the most staunch helpers of a Pastor. Then they would be welcomed by priests. They would be a real asset to any parish. Pastors would clamor for a unit of Oblates of St. Benedict.

In modern times there have been fine organized movements to carry out some ideal or some work, such as The Christophers, Father Peyton's Rosary Crusade. The Oblate Movement could be made a crusade that would help to make the Church stronger throughout the Country, throughout the world. It is not a new fad. It is a time-tried idea that merely needs to be put to energetic work.

A continuation of the instructions given to Novices could be developed so that Oblates would be prepared for an intelligent and energetic life of action for God.

Definite plans for meetings of the Oblates could be worked out so that each meeting accomplishes something evidently good and definite. Now the meetings are merely another gathering without any special aim or purpose. One Oblate once told me she could have stayed at home and spent the time reading a book with much more profit.

Where no Benedictine leaders are present in a parish, a plan of instructions could be printed for use of secular priests who at times meet with the Oblates to invest Novices or receive Oblations. They would know everything they need to know to do this work well and correctly. It would be printed black on white, uniform
for all places.

From all this you at least know that I have thought about the matter and am interested in it. My hope is that someone will some time take an energetic lead to carry out this great work. If some big Abbey could be induced to volunteer to undertake this work it could grow into a worldwide apostolate and help to make the Benedictine Order flourish greatly.

Asking God to bless your work and effort, I am

Yours most cordially

Ignatius, O.S.B.
Archabbot
A 25-Lesson Course of Instruction for Oblate Novices of St. Benedict


5. Fruits of Benedictine Life. No. of Popes and Bishops and prominent scholars of the Order.


7. Distinction between Vows and Oblation.

8. Distinction between Oblates of St. Benedict and Tertiaries. Family Life ideal in the Benedictine plan. The family is the social unit.

9. What the Oblates should not be. Not faddists, not pietistic persons.

10. Aim and purpose of Oblate Life in general.

11. Oblates should love St. Benedict, the Pope, their Bishop, their Pastor. They should be an asset to their parish, to the Church.

12. Oblates should be great Teachers, Apostles, by example. So let your light shine!

13. Let nothing be preferred to the Work of God. What are the firsts in the spiritual life for an Oblate? The Mass. The Liturgy. The Office.

14. Following the Mass with the Missal, receiving your education from the Missal.
15. Learning the Liturgy.
16. The Divine Office.
17. The Oblate and Family Life.
18. The Oblate and his neighbors or society.
19. The Oblate and his Parish.
20. Privileges of being an Oblate.
22. Oblates and Convert work.
23. The Oblate's ambition to grow in holiness.
25. The Oblate draws his principles of the spiritual life from Holy Rule of St. Benedict.
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