The Benedictine Oblate Letter
March 2022

Do you realize what I have done for you?
If I, the master and teacher have washed your feet,
you ought to wash one another's feet. (Jn 13:14)

Dear Oblates and Friends,

In just a few weeks at the conclusion of our forty days of Lenten preparation we will celebrate the most solemn and glorious days of the Church year. Extending over three days known as the Triduum, the Church will celebrate one continuing liturgy making present the Paschal Mystery of Christ: his Passion, death, and Resurrection. Beginning with the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper on Holy Thursday, we will commemorate the events of Good Friday, and reach the pinnacle of joy in the celebration of Easter.

Three great events are celebrated at the evening Mass which begins the Triduum: the memorial of Passover, the institution of the Eucharist, and the institution of the priesthood. The Gospel accounts tell us that Jesus instructed his apostles to prepare an upper room in which to celebrate the Jewish Passover meal. During this meal, on this night before he died, Jesus institutionalized the Sacrament of Love that we may be one. The Gospel of Luke puts it this way:

When the hour came, Jesus took his place at table with the apostles. He said to them, I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer…then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them saying, "This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me. And likewise, the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you." (Lk 22:14-19)

The Gospel of John goes on to tell us that later during the meal, *Jesus took a towel and tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and dry them with the towel around his waist. (Jn 13:5) Do you realize what I have done for you? he asked. If I, the 'master' and 'teacher' have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet (vs14). Knowing* he would be with them only a little while longer, Jesus said: *I give you a new commandment: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love of one another. (Jn 13:34-5)*

Though the disciples according to the Scriptures, clearly did not understand the significance of all these words and actions of Jesus on this solemn night, in time with the grace of the Holy

Spirit they came to understand fully, and were empowered to proclaim God's redeeming love through Christ Jesus.

In study of the Scriptures, we know that the early New Testament texts were written in Greek. The Greek word *agape* is used when referring to *God's love* – immeasurable, outpouring, and ongoing. It is through this *holy love*, that God sent his only son for the world's redemption. (Jn 3:16) This is love far beyond mere emotion or attraction to someone or some thing. It is not merely friendly or brotherly affection. *God's holy love* is a powerful force for the Good. It is given unconditionally and unreservedly. It is the incomparable love of God the Father for humankind that was made manifest in the self-sacrifice of Christ Jesus. This is the love Jesus was referring to when he gave his disciples the *new commandment*: "*Love one another as I have loved you."*

It occurs to me that this love, *agape*, is what Saint Benedict would have us reach as he guides us in his Rule to the *"loftier summits"* of spiritual life. This is *the light of life* he refers to in his *Prologue* (vs 13), that guards us from *the darkness of death.* It is the love that *hastens us toward our heavenly home* (Ch 73).

This is the love that Benedict is speaking of in Chapter 4, *The Tools for Good Works*, where he instructs us to love the Lord God *with all our heart*, our *whole soul* and *all our strength*, and to *love our neighbor as ourselves* (vs1). It is the *pure love* of brothers, love that is *unfeigned and humble which* prefers nothing whatever to Christ. This is the love through which we will be *brought together to everlasting life*.

This is the *fervent love* associated with the *Good Zeal* Benedict writes about in Chapter 72 that resonates with the love of Jesus at the Last Supper and on the Cross. It is the highest expression of pure self-sacrificing love for the good of others. Listen to what Benedict says in verses 3-7:

This then, is the good zeal which we must foster with fervent love: we should each try to be the first to show respect to the other, supporting with the greatest patience on another's weaknesses of body or behavior, and earnestly competing in obedience to one another. No one is to pursue what he judges better for himself, but instead, what he judges better for someone else.

This holy love is spoken of again by Benedict in Chapter 53, *The Reception of Guests.*
Here Benedict clearly identifies Christ as dwelling in others and instructs the community to respond to guests with all humility and love, praying with them and washing their feet. *Christ is to be adored and welcomed in them* says Benedict, for Christ himself will say, *I was a stranger and you welcomed me (vs1).*

In the Gospels as in the Rule we are called to live out God's love in our interactions with one another. During these remaining weeks of Lent, we may still feel challenged in our thoughts concerning Lenten practices - what should we be "giving up?" …what should we "be doing?"

Perhaps reflecting on our relationship with God and our relationship with others in terms of *agape* love is what we are being called to. We might think of Lent in these remaining days as an opportunity for a concerted effort to go deeper with God - receiving God's love with an openness of heart and mind, listening to his voice within us and around us, and being responsive to what God is saying to us personally. We might do some self-reflection around the relationships we have with others- for good or for not-so-good.

We may be tempted to think that we cannot love as Jesus loved. That we are not "quite there yet." That it is just not possible - not at this time, anyway. It is this highest form of love though, that we are being called to as Christians. We can remember that the disciples who sat at table with Jesus were not so different from us in their weaknesses and imperfections, in their bewilderments and lack of understanding, or even in their inclinations to sin. With the grace and power of the Holy Spirit given to them though, they went on to proclaim the Gospel with their lives and with full *agape* love. We can look too to the example these days of so many people pouring themselves out in aiding the millions of war refugees around the world. Those in Ukraine especially are rising to an inner call to care for the needs of others, even at risk to their own lives. This is sacrificial love- outpouring and ongoing - intentionally desiring another's highest good - the loving of one's neighbor as oneself.

Benedict tells us that with "the help of Christ" we can reach the "loftier summits" of love. It all begins with opening our hearts to God and allowing God's love to flow into us and through us.

May these remaining days of Lent be a time for us of opening our hearts ever wider to receive the God who loves us beyond all telling. May we open our hearts to Christ Jesus who poured out his life in love for us.

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. (Jer 29:13)

I give you a new commandment: love one another.

Oblate News

Clyde, Missouri

Please join us via Zoom on Saturday, April 23rd, for the last session of our Holiness series. Sister Nancy Rose Gucwa will present Perseverance on the Journey.
For information contact Sr. Kathleen Clare at kathleenclr@gmail.com

Tucson, Arizona

For information call Sharon 520-664-5136 or email Tucsonoblates@gmail.com

Mesa/East Valley, Arizona
We are able now to meet in-person at Benedictine University for Morning Prayer and Lectio. Masks are not required. We will Zoom host those who can't make it in-person. After the break, we will Zoom into the Sisters' meeting. Those not at the University will need to Zoom in on their own. Hope to see you on Saturday, April 23rd.
For information contact Nancy Kaib at 480-883-8025 or email nancykaib@hotmail.com

Phoenix Central, Arizona
For information contact Patty Williams at benedictine@cox.net

Sheridan, Wyoming
We are very grateful for the Zoom presentations by Sr. Hope and Sr. Kathleen Clare on Pope Francis' *Gaudete et Excultate.* Our only sorrow is that we have now finished this beautiful and inspiring letter. Our next meeting is April 23rd .
For information contact Cel Hope at celhaus@fiberpipe.net

Sand Springs, Oklahoma
Our next meeting will be Sunday, April 3rd at our new meeting time of 1:00 PM.
For information about our group contact Gale Clark at glclarkrdh@gmail.com

Peace,
Sr. Kathleen Clare, OSB