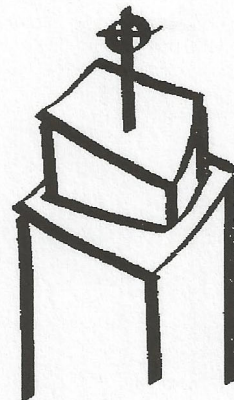


# OUR FAMILY NEWS

For Oblates of St. Bede Abbey, Peru, Illinois



March &  
April, 2016



## THE ASCENSION OF THE LORD

Before the reform of the liturgy that followed Vatican II, it was prescribed by the missal that on the feast of the Ascension, after the gospel had been read, the paschal candle be extinguished. This gave a certain tone of sadness to the feast: it seemed to symbolize that the risen Jesus, who had been with us during the forty days that followed Easter, had now departed. This usage has been suppressed, and the candle is now kept burning until the Easter season closes with Pentecost. I believe that this minor change in our ritual practice tells us something about the meaning of the solemnity of the Ascension.

Jesus told the disciples, *If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.* In a remarkable sermon from the fifth century, Pope St. Leo the Great explained this passage as follows. “In other words,” he said, “if you could comprehend the glory that is bestowed on you by the fact that I, who was begotten of God the Father, was also born of a human mother; that I the Lord of eternity, chose to become mortal with mortals; that I, the Invisible, have shown myself in visible form; that I, who have the nature of the everlasting God, have assumed the nature of a slave: if you had knowledge of these things, I say, you *would* indeed *rejoice that I am going to the Father.*” And he continued: “The truth is that this ascension of mine is a free gift to you; it is your lowly existence that is raised up in me to the Father’s right hand. But I who share the Father’s nature dwell with him inseparably; when I came to you I did not leave him, and now that I am returning to him I do not abandon you.”

In this passage I believe that St. Leo has penetrated to the heart of the mystery of the celebration of the Ascension. In the course of the liturgical year, we keep the memory of a series of events in the earthly life of Jesus as they are recorded in the gospels. We remember his conception on March 25, his human birth on December 25, the following events of his infancy and childhood during the rest of the Christmas cycle. On the Sundays of Ordinary Time we are reminded of the whole succession of wonderful deeds that he performed during his public life--the healings, expulsions of demons, and nature miracles that he performed--and of the parables that he told and the instructions that he gave to the crowds and to individuals. During Lent and Passiontide we follow the account of the events that led up to his arrest, and then the story of his passion and death at the hands of his enemies. All of these things are historical events: they actually happened here on planet earth in the course of our human history, at a precise time and place. In this sense they are comparable to the Civil War or the French Revolution.

But the Ascension of Jesus is not like that. St. Luke is the only one of the evangelists who describes it in that way, in order to make it understandable to us. The other New Testament writers speak only of Jesus being now exalted at the right hand of his Father as a result of his resurrection. The ascension takes place on another plane of existence, beyond our experience and our ability to imagine it. The essential point is that our human nature, which Jesus shared completely with us, is now glorified at the right hand of God the Father. This is how the liturgy also speaks of the ascension: today’s special addition to the Roman Canon, Eucharistic Prayer I, says, “Celebrating the most sacred day on which your Only Begotten Son, our Lord, placed at the right hand of your glory our weak human nature....”



Jesus admonishes us and all his disciples to be joyful about this: *Rejoice*, he says, *because I go to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.* St. Leo expands

upon this saying of Jesus as follows: “I have united you to myself, and have become the son of a human being to enable you to become the children of God. Although I am one and the same person in both natures, in the nature that I share with you I am less than the Father, but in that nature that is inseparable from the Father’s, I am greater even than myself.” When we try to think about this, we quickly come to the limits of human intelligence, and keep coming back to the mystery of the Incarnation. How, indeed, can the same person be both divine and human? This is the bedrock of our faith. In assuming our nature, Jesus has joined us to himself and therefore to the divinity in which he fully shares: we, who are flesh, are admitted to a share in the divinity. “And so,” says St. Leo, “let what is less than the Father go to the Father; where the Word has his eternal dwelling, there let the flesh dwell also.” Thus in the Ascension of Jesus we too are glorified. We do not yet dwell in heaven, as we are well aware. But our humanity is there, and that means that the essential condition for us to do so has already been fulfilled.

+Fr. Claude Peifer, O.S.B.



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**Our Family News** is published in the special interest of the oblates of St. Bede Abbey. Please send changes of address and comments to The Editor, Our Family News, St. Bede Abbey, 24 W US Highway 6, Peru, IL 61354.

We welcome your submissions to this publication, either instructive or reflective, whether prose or poetry. They should in some way relate to the **Rule of Benedict**, Benedictine spirituality, and/or the oblate program. The editor reserves the rights to choose material for publication and to edit as necessary.

## SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETINGS

Meetings are held in the abbey church from 1:30 P.M. to 4:30 P.M.

SUNDAY, MARCH 13, 2016

Sunday, April 10, 2016  
Sunday, May 1, 2016

### Passage for *Lectio* at the March Meeting

He abideth patiently,  
he understandeth mercifully,  
he forgiveth easily,  
he forgetteth utterly.

*Lines scribbled in the margin  
of a fourteenth-century manuscript  
by an unknown scribe.*

### Passage for *Lectio* at the April Meeting

Hear my voice when I call, O Lord;  
be merciful to me and answer me.  
My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"  
Your face, Lord, I will seek.  
Do not hide your face from me,  
do not turn your servant away in  
anger;  
you have been my helper.  
Do not reject me or forsake me,  
O God my Savior.  
Though my father and mother  
forsake me,  
the Lord will receive me.

Psalm 27:7-10

In your prayers, kindly remember  
Richard Slavish, oblate and longtime  
friend of St. Bede Abbey, who  
passed away recently.

### Abbey Prayer Schedule

Visitors are welcome to join the monks for Mass and for the hours of the Divine Office. Conventual Mass is celebrated on the first level of the abbey church, the hours of the Divine Office on the second level. During the school year, the monks' schedule is as follows.

6:00 A.M. Morning Prayer\*  
12:00 Noon Midday Prayer  
5:00 P.M. Conventual Mass\*\*  
7:10 P.M. Evening Prayer\*\*\*

\* on Sunday, 7:00 A.M.

\*\* on Sunday, 10:00 A.M. and on Monday, 7:30 A.M.

\*\*\* on Sunday, 5:00 P.M.

