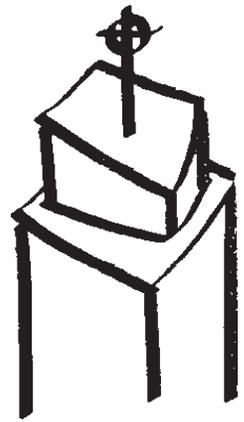


OUR FAMILY NEWS

For Oblates of St. Bede Abbey, Peru, Illinois

Summer, 2015



THE NEED TO BE KNEADED

In this year's final issue of Our Family News, we offer our readers a timely essay by Fr. Dominic, our resident baker of renown, in which he likens progress in the spiritual life to the process of (what else?) making bread.

In the chapter on the qualities of the abbot, the *Rule of St. Benedict* states that the teaching of the abbey's spiritual father "should, like the leaven of divine justice, permeate the minds of his disciples" (*RB* 2:5). When I was attending an institute for junior monks many years ago, I was assigned this verse of the Rule and told to prepare a commentary for the class. That first brief reflection eventually evolved into *Bake and Be Blessed*, my book on the spiritual lessons of bread baking. In my contemplation of the process of baking, I came to the realization that kneading dough had a lot in common with the Divine Office and *lectio divina*.

When you begin the process of mixing ingredients for bread and kneading the dough, something extraordinary is taking place on the molecular level. Two protein molecules (glutenin and gliadin) found in wheat flour combine with water to form a stretchy protein molecule called gluten. In the process of mixing and kneading, this miraculous molecule stretches out and wraps around itself to form a flexible web of protein, acting as a net to capture the carbon dioxide produced by the yeast in the process of consuming sugars. Without this infrastructure of gluten molecules, the carbon dioxide escapes through the surface of the dough, and the bread will not rise.

What is most remarkable about this whole process is that it is virtually invisible, since it takes place on the molecular level. As you mix and knead, you can't see the glutenin and gliadin bond with water to form the all-important gluten, nor is it possible to watch the individual protein strands wrap around and connect with each other to form the gluten network. But after six or eight or ten minutes of vigorous kneading, there is an obvious difference in the dough. It becomes lively, supple and smooth. The dough has an inner resilience that allows it to hold its shape when it rises and bakes free-form on a baking sheet and that keeps it from spilling over the sides of a loaf pan in the heat of the oven.

In the spiritual life, daily meditation and prayer are the activities that develop a similar interior resilience in the believer. By "mixing and kneading" the gospel of Christ into our lives through the daily discipline of reading and reflection, a spiritual infrastructure is formed, slowly and invisibly, that helps us to "hold our shape," that is, maintain our identity as Christians regardless of exterior conditions.

One of the frustrations expressed by people in the early stages of beginning to pray is that "it seems like nothing is happening." Despite a daily commitment to prayer and regular reading of the Bible and other spiritual texts, they feel as though they have not been significantly changed by the experience. "I don't expect God to speak to me directly," a friend of mine told me, "but I'd like to think that prayer would change me somehow."

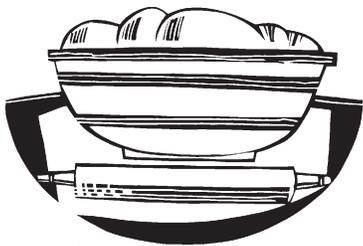
But the changes that take place in the believer are like the changes in the dough during kneading: they occur inside of us, sometimes at an infinitesimal level of the heart, in some small and secret part of the soul that confounds calibration or measurement. Connections are being made, like that between the molecules of protein and water, that we cannot

immediately perceive—but those connections are real, and they have a cumulative effect as long as we are faithful to the daily discipline of prayer.

Dedication to prayer is not easy. Sometimes prayer seems repetitive, boring, even physically exhausting. In addition to daily Mass at Saint Bede Abbey, we pray together at least three times a day using the Book of Psalms as our primary text. We go through the full psalter every two weeks, which means that at the time of this writing, I have prayed each of the psalms approximately 572 times. (I'm not bragging—some of my confreres could double that number!) Faithfulness to daily prayer requires a certain level of spiritual stamina and perseverance even when it seems “nothing is happening.”

One never knows when those tiny connections may coalesce into a genuine insight or personal revelation. Once I was meditating on the temptation in the desert (Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus has fasted in the Judean wilderness for forty days, and the devil visits him in his weakness. “If you are the Son of God,” Satan urges, “command that these stones become loaves of bread.” I had heard, read and prayed about this passage many times with the understanding that the devil is tempting Jesus to use his power for personal comfort. On this particular day, I realized that the temptation lay not only in Jesus' immediate physical hunger, but in the more dangerous belief that all hungers should be immediately satisfied. The desire for instant gratification is a greater temptation than the desire for bread. Like Esau selling his birthright for a bowl of stew, we risk losing our divine birthright in exchange for the pleasure of the moment. Making that small connection in meditation led to another 30 minutes of reflection and a full page in my journal.

Familiarity with Scripture through daily meditation also makes biblical references arise during other activities. Scripture passages come to mind often in the kitchen, but the same thing happens at other times. When I fly kites with a friend and his children, I'm reminded of Psalm 139:8: “If I ascend to the heavens, you are there.” When I feel anxious about a friend who is seriously ill, I take comfort from Psalm 41:4: “The LORD sustains them on their sickbed, allays the malady when they are ill.” I've even heard this sort of biblical sub-referencing during a monastic game of volleyball. One monk cheerfully threatened his confrere on the other side of the net, and his opponent replied with a promise to spike the ball, accompanied by a quote from Psalm 81:11: “Open wide your mouth that I may fill it!”



How can we ensure that such powerful texts will be available to our memories when we need them? The answer, as I mentioned in the first paragraph, is dedication to the Divine Office and to *lectio* as well. I'm sure our oblates who are regular practitioners of these spiritual disciplines can affirm how they help make “the leaven of divine justice” permeate their hearts and minds.

So when you are making out your summer reading list or packing that weekend bag for the beach or the lakefront, make sure you include your office book and bible as well. Half an hour of *lectio* on vacation or starting each day with morning prayer can make sure that you return home renewed and refreshed in mind, body *and* spirit.

--- Fr. Dominic Garramone, O.S.B.

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.

UPCOMING EVENT

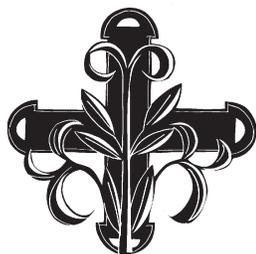
The annual oblate picnic is set for

**Sunday, July 19,
from 12:00 Noon to 3:00 P.M.,**

in the shelter across from the academy.

Please bring a dish to pass and your own table service and beverage.

Feel free to bring a lawn chair, a deck of cards, or anything else that you think might be enjoyable for yourself or for the group.



In your prayers, kindly remember oblates Mary Louise Mini and Jack Piper, who passed away this spring.

SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETINGS

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

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2015

Sunday, October 11, 2015

Sunday, November 8, 2015
(Oblates Day)

Sunday, December 6, 2015

Sunday, January 10, 2016

Sunday, February 14, 2016

Sunday, March 13, 2016

Sunday, April 10, 2016

Sunday, May 1, 2016

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 summer, the monks' schedule is as follows.

- 6:00 A.M. Morning Prayer*
 - 12:00 Noon Midday Prayer
 - 8:00 A.M. Conventual Mass**
 - 7:10 P.M. Evening Prayer***
- * on Sunday, 7:00 A.M.
** on Sunday, 10:00 A.M.
*** on Sunday, 5:00 P.M.

