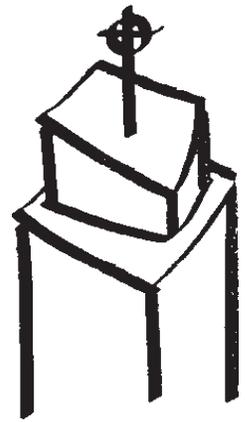


OUR FAMILY



NEWS



For Oblates of St. Bede Abbey, Peru, Illinois

November &
December, 2013

RECEIVING THE WORD MADE FLESH

Dear Oblates of St. Bede Abbey,

I am grateful for this opportunity to offer you a reflection on so important a component of our faith as the mystery of the Word made Flesh, a mystery we shall soon be celebrating in a special way at Christmas. I am grateful as well for the additional opportunity thereby afforded me to possibly contribute something to your current study of *lectio divina* by using *lectio* as the means by which to furnish that reflection—more precisely, by actually engaging in *lectio* and sharing with you not only the fruit, the reflection itself, but also the process of my doing so.

The text that I chose for these purposes was that of the gospel for Christmas midnight Mass, Luke 2:1-14. The plan that I adopted was to use this text for *lectio* on three consecutive days, each day record something of my experience with it that day, and each day compose and transcribe a prayer that flowed from that experience. The results of my endeavor follow, and as easily understandable as they seem to me to be, I believe that it might be beneficial if I put them in context, as it were, by prefacing them with a couple of observations about the nature of *lectio divina*.

First, *lectio* is more about *formation*, or, perhaps better, *transformation*, than it is about *information*. We acquire the latter by attending to God's word with our minds, reading and studying it so as to increase our knowledge of and deepen our intellectual understanding of it. We achieve the former—or, more accurately, allow God to do so—by

attending to his word with our hearts, listening and surrendering to it so as to further the spiritual growth that it nurtures and deepen the moral conversion that it effects.

Second, the practice of *lectio* requires of a person both an act of faith in the *richness* of God's word—a belief that however many people may read and ponder the same given scriptural passage, God can speak in and through that passage to each of them personally, addressing the specific life situation of each—and an act of faith in the *dynamism* of God's word—a belief that God in fact does just that, whether a person listens or not.

THE FIRST DAY: NO ROOM IN THE INN

I commenced by reading the gospel text slowly several times, until I was particularly struck by the statement that Jesus was laid in a manger "because there was no room for them in the inn." I

spent some time meditating on the question of how much room there is for Jesus in the inn of my heart... which, of



course, led me to the question of why there isn't *more* room for him. I had to ask myself just what the clutter is in this heart of mine that takes up the space that could and should be his. I rather readily found a partial answer in those things that can most easily usurp that space in anyone's heart, without a person realizing it, because they are things that in themselves are good and often important, what might be considered quite understandable—perhaps one might go so far as to say excusable—clutter. But I felt uneasy: those things, I knew instinctively, do not make up the bulk of the clutter.

Then I thought of Christ's words in the third chapter of the book of Revelation: "I am standing at the door, knocking." And I remembered that marvelous picture, inspired by these words, that depicts Jesus knocking at a door that has no handle on the outside, on *his* side, because the door to every heart can be opened only from the inside. And... I felt a distinct hesitation to open the door to mine. I had to ask myself the further question of why I am so reluctant to offer Jesus even the little space that is, after all, available for him in my heart. This turned out to be the key question, as it were.

It dawned on me that I am so reluctant, to begin with, because of the shame I would feel at his discovering that the room I can give him *is* as little as it is, but also and far more so because of the shame I would feel at his discovering that the clutter that to such a great extent is taking his place is definitely *inexcusable*... and most of all because of the shame I would feel at his discovering exactly what that inexcusable clutter consists of: selfishness, stubbornness, laziness, a quickness to judge others. If I let the Lord into my heart, he would see the truth of my sinfulness and, what's more, force me to acknowledge it.

But then, mercifully, I also perceived something of the relief that I would feel if I *did* let him see my imperfections, my sinfulness, knowing that his desire to enter my heart and share himself with me is a desire to forgive me of these and to help me rid myself of them. I began to understand that he does not require or even ask that the inn of my heart be spacious and in the best of order for him to enter, that even the tiniest amount of room is enough for him, that he and I could sit together in the mess, and that in the end I would in fact find comfort in his presence.

"Lord, bless me with the wisdom and courage to open the door to the inn that is my heart. Regard me with mercy and grant me the grace of your presence, so that I may have that fullness of life and love that you want me to have. How foolish I have sometimes been, keeping that door closed! You are the one for whom I most long; yours is the peace for which I most yearn; and *you* come to *me*, bringing with you that peace and all else that I could possibly desire. I need only open the door and receive you."

THE SECOND DAY: THE MAIDEN AND HER CHILD

The second day the gospel text took hold of my imagination—or perhaps I should say that it fired my imagination and that the Holy Spirit took hold of it—for in all that I experienced, spiritual realities seemed somehow palpable, and I know of no other way of explaining that.

I pictured myself in the stable with Mary and Jesus, and, so situated, became increasingly aware of the amazing contrasts and paradoxes that it held. Over against the penetrating physical cold of the place was the radiant spiritual warmth of those who had taken shelter in it; over against the overpowering filth of the place was their unassailable purity. Over against its very rudeness were both perceptible human tenderness and hidden divine majesty.

But I had not been surveying the stable itself as mystery upon mystery presented itself to me. I had been gazing at Mary and Jesus. At a certain point I began to feel almost as if I were spying on them, when suddenly they noticed me and turned toward me. At first I wanted to shrink away, but the look on both of their faces was one of invitation, and so I slowly moved forward and drew closer to them. When I was nearly standing in front of them, Mary whispered, "For *you*!"

As I stared at her in disbelief, she said again, "For *you*! He has come in love to save *you*. He would have come even if you had been the only one." I responded to her as she herself had responded to the angel Gabriel: "How can this be?"

And then, in even greater puzzlement, I asked, “*Why* can this be?” She replied, in utter simplicity, “It is the way of God’s heart. Will you allow yourself to believe, to be embraced by God’s love?”

In that graced moment, I perceived something of the depths of God’s love, enough to make me wonder how I could ever close my heart to it. The imagining stopped, and I found myself, literally, on my knees. Then I sat down, absorbing as much as I could of that love, repeating over and over, “*For you!*” and finding indescribable peace, freedom, and joy.

“Lord Jesus, only-begotten Child of God, you were born the child of Mary to reveal the depths of your Father’s love for his other children here below—for me, for each and all. Grant me the faith to *accept* that love. Again—and again—enable me, by the power of your Spirit, to plumb its depths; again—and again—let me know the joy that comes from being loved so deeply. And grant me the courage to *return* that love. Enable me to render to the Father all that I am, all that I think and say and do, everything that makes up my life, in daily concrete service to him and to my brothers and sisters. When I grow weak or lazy, lead me back to the stable and let me hear again those words from the lips of your mother, ‘*For you!*’”

THE THIRD DAY: THE CALL TO SERVICE

It was already with gratitude to God that I prepared to read the gospel text the third day, gratitude for what I believed his word had accomplished in me the previous two days, for what I believed it had given me both the desire and the strength to do. I felt that I had opened the door to the inn of my heart and welcomed the Lord Jesus inside, that I had accepted the challenge and acted on the impetus he had given me to change my ways, my life, myself. I felt that I had kept my heart open to the love of the Father and continued to absorb that love. I was *full* of gratitude, and I was full of joy.

It was hardly a surprise, then, to discover that I was particularly attracted, this day, to the joyous proclamation of the angels: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” So fervently did I want to join in the angelic praise that I almost broke into song. In my exuberance I recited the verse over and over . . . until, that is, the second part of it started to unnerve me.

Why? Because it was making me recognize that what glory is given to God is *dependent* on what effort is made to secure peace for those on whom his favor rests. The insight was sobering. So were the two thoughts that immediately followed it. The first was that God desires that his favor rest on every one of us, that every one of us be saved. The second was that to secure peace for everyone, one must work for justice for everyone. The question of how I as a monk can and should do that was not a new one, but I welcomed the opportunity to re-examine it, especially since my situation has changed from what it had been for so many years: as an abbot, I now have more and different opportunities to further the causes of justice and peace.

I reminded myself that I can and should continue to pray for all of my brothers and sisters throughout the world who have been denied justice and deprived of peace. I reminded myself that I can and should—how shall I put it?—“ground” myself in my efforts by praying especially for people with whom I am personally acquainted and have a conflict, for people whom I know personally and to any extent and for whatever reason dislike.

I reminded myself that, as an abbot, I need to be attentive enough to the people with whom I live—and for whom I am supposed to hold the place of Christ in the monastery—to be able to discern if any of *them* are hungering and thirsting for justice or are aching for peace, either with others or with themselves . . . that I need to be caring enough to respond to *their* pain wisely and lovingly. I reminded myself that, as an abbot, I need to conscientiously and responsibly direct the almsgiving of my monastery to organizations that work effectively to help those of God’s children, whether near or far, who are most in distress.

I saw that, essentially, I have to try to make Christ present to others and try to find a way of saying to each of them what was said to me: “*For you!*”

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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.

“Lord Jesus, give me greater compassion, that I may give greater glory to your Father. Grant me a sustained lively awareness of my kinship with all other human beings and a sustained active concern for their well-being. Bless my efforts to help the many around the world who are without justice and peace. As I ask that you do not let me forget the suffering who live in distant places and whom I do not know, I ask that you do not let me forget the suffering who live at my side and whom I do know. And as I ask that you make my love as inclusive as your own, I ask that you make it as strong.”

Although this progressive reflection born of *lectio divina* is highly personal—born of *lectio divina* it could be none other—I hope that you have been able to recognize something of your own life experience somewhere in it and have somehow profited from the recognition. Whether you have or not, may the Lord Jesus grant *you* all the good that, in the course of the reflection, I have prayed he grant *me*.

Abbot Philip Davey, O.S.B.

NOVEMBER 10 OBLATES DAY SCHEDULE

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| 10:00 A.M. | Conventual Mass, within which oblates will renew their oblations |
| 11:00 A.M. | Coffee and socializing in the abbey church lounge |
| 12:00 noon | Midday Prayer with the monks in the abbey church choir chapel |
| 12:15 P.M. | Lunch with the monks in the monastery refectory |
| After lunch | Gathering in the abbey church: the oblation of Arthur DeGrande, Jr. |
| 2:30 P.M. | Conclusion of meeting |

Passages for *Lectio* at the December Meeting

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you and move you to live by my statutes and be careful to keep my laws. You shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Ezekiel 36:26-28

NEXT REGULAR MEETINGS

Sunday, December 8, 2013

Sunday, January 12, 2014

1:30 P.M. to 4:30 P.M. in the abbey church

We can be sure that we have come to know God only if we keep his commandments.

1 John 2:3