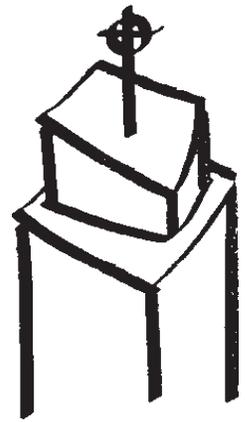


# OUR FAMILY



# NEWS



For Oblates of St. Bede Abbey, Peru, Illinois

September &  
October, 2015

## GOD'S MERCY ENDURES FOREVER

On December 8, 2015, the feast of the Immaculate Conception, Pope Francis will push open the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica, a door normally sealed from the inside, to inaugurate an Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Mercy. On that same day, a Door of Mercy will be opened in designated churches in dioceses around the world. Throughout the year, the faithful will be encouraged to pass through these doors in penitence and hope to experience the saving mercy of God.

A fitting preparation for Oblates for this Jubilee Year is to look at the Psalms to see what they tell us of God's mercy. Indeed, the Pope turned to the psalms in his proclamation of the Jubilee Year, mentioning particularly Psalms 103, 136 and 146. In solidarity, then, with the Pope, this article will consider those three psalms as representative of the psalter's instruction on God's mercy. We must begin, however, with a quick lesson in Hebrew vocabulary.

The Hebrew word *hesed*, translated as *miseriordia* in the Vulgate, occurs more than 250 times in the Old Testament. In the psalms, alone, it appears more than 70 times in over 45 different psalms. Although the precise meaning of the word in various contexts has been the subject of much scholarly debate, all agree that no single English word can provide an adequate translation. So, for example, in the verse that forms the refrain of Psalm 136, *hesed* is translated variously as "mercy," "faithful love," "love," and "steadfast love." Katharine Doob Sackenfled, writing on the meaning of the word in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, notes that God's *hesed* toward Israel is predicated on three dimensions of the word common in its use in secular contexts: "commitment, provision for need, and freedom."

God's commitment to the Hebrew people is entrenched in their unique covenant relationship. This begins in Genesis when God promises Abraham, "I will maintain my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you throughout the ages as an everlasting covenant" (Gn 17:6).<sup>1</sup> Later, God tells Moses, "I am mindful of my covenant. Therefore, say to the Israelites: I am the Lord. I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians...I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God; and I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (Ex 6: 5-7). Throughout salvation history, God supplies Israel's needs, be it manna in the desert or victory over an enemy. At the same time, God acts freely, totally immune to any attempts at bribery or coercion.

The evidence of this enduring *hesed* is the subject of Psalm 136, a wonderful hymn of praise. This psalm is called "the great *hallel*" (from the Hebrew word *halal* meaning "to praise"), and is recited at the morning Sabbath service and on festivals. It is also sung at the Passover Seder meal, so Jesus and his disciples would have sung Psalm 136 at the Last Supper.

The first section uses parallel structure and repetition to introduce both the theme and the refrain:



Praise the Lord, for he is good,  
for his mercy endures forever;  
Praise the God of gods,  
for his mercy endures forever;  
Praise the Lord of lords,  
for his mercy endures forever. (Ps 136: 1-3)

Section 2 (4-9) calls attention to the grandeur and beauty of the heavens as reason to praise God's loving kindness toward all people manifest in creation. Section 3 (10-16) sharpens the focus to God's *hesed* for Israel in particular, recounting God's mighty deeds in the exodus:

Who struck down the firstborn of Egypt,  
for his mercy endures forever;  
And led Israel from their midst,  
for his mercy endures forever. (10-11)

Section 4 (17-22) continues this focus on the Israelites, recounting how God defeated other nations in order to make their lands "a heritage for Israel, his servant" (22). Section 5 (23-25) draws those reciting the psalm, including us, into this long history of God's enduring mercy: "The Lord remembered us in our low estate" (23). Just as the land was "a heritage for Israel," something to be passed on to their descendants, God's *hesed* also is something that succeeding generations can expect to experience and praise.

The last sections open outward again, to call for praise of the God who "gives bread to all flesh." (25) Though God's saving interventions in history were particular to Israel, nonetheless, God cares for the basic needs of all creatures. The psalm ends with an *inclusio* calling on all to

Praise the God of heaven,  
for his mercy endures forever. (26)

Like Psalm 136, Psalm 103 also mentions God's *hesed* toward Israel as evidenced in the Exodus (Ps 103:7), but the saving events of history are not this psalm's main focus. The psalm opens with a call to the psalmist's soul, his very being, to sing praise to the Lord:

Bless the Lord, my soul;  
all my being, bless his holy name! (1)

To "bless the Lord" means to proclaim aloud God's power and deeds, and in this psalm the focus is God's endless acts of forgiveness. The Lord is the one

Who pardons all your sins  
and heals all your ills,  
Who redeems your life from the pit  
and crowns you with love and compassion. (3-4)

The language of the second section (6-10) echoes God's self-revelation to Moses on Mt. Sinai:

The Lord, the Lord, a God gracious and merciful, slow to anger and  
abounding in love and fidelity, continuing his love for a thousand generations,  
and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin; yet not declaring the guilty  
guiltless, but bringing punishment for their parents' wickedness on children  
and children's children to the third and fourth generation (Ex 34:6-7).

The psalmist and his listeners would be fully aware that these words were spoken to Moses after he had discovered the Israelites worshipping the golden calf. Thus, when he declares that God

has not dealt with us as our sins merit  
nor requited us as our wrongs deserve (10),

the psalmist may well have in mind the many occasions in their history when the people of Israel turned to false gods.

The third section (11-17) provides beautiful images from creation to describe the magnitude of God's *hesed*. It towers over us "as the heavens tower over the earth" and causes God to remove our sins "as far as the east is from the west." Though we are "dust" and our "days are like the grass,...the Lord's mercy is from age to age toward those who fear him" (15, 17). Adherence to the precepts of the covenant leads to life, "so your youth is renewed like the eagle's" (5). The psalm ends with a call to all the Lord's creatures "everywhere in his domain," from the heavens above to the earth below, to "Bless the Lord!"

Psalm 146 begins with similar words, but they are a declaration rather than a command:

Praise the Lord, my soul;  
I will praise the Lord all my life,  
sing praise to my God while I live. (Ps 146:1-2)

After warning his listeners to "put no trust in princes" (3), the psalmist declares blessed the person "whose hope is in the Lord, his God / the maker of heaven and earth" (6). But in this psalm, attention is not on the mighty deeds of God in history or even the Lord's willingness to forgive sins. Rather, the focus is God's merciful actions toward the least in society, presented in a list that is a preview of Christ's deeds during his time on earth. The Lord

secures justice for the oppressed,  
gives bread to the hungry,  
sets prisoners free,  
gives sight to the blind,  
raises up those who are bowed down,  
comes to the aid of the orphan and the widow,  
but thwarts the way of the wicked. (7-9)

Commenting on this list, Pope Francis declares that it shows God's *hesed* is "a visceral love. It gushes forth from the depths naturally, full of tenderness and compassion, indulgence and mercy."<sup>2</sup>

What should be our response to God's boundless *hesed*? How do we "bless the Lord"? Jesus gives us the answer: "Be merciful just as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36). Indeed, "Merciful like the Father" is the motto Pope Francis has chosen for this year. We who have over and over been the beneficiaries of God's generous *hesed* are to do likewise through compassion, love and forgiveness toward others.

Pope Francis' chose as his episcopal, and then papal, motto words from a commentary on the call of Levi by our patron, St. Bede: *miserando atque eligendo*, Jesus looked on Levi "with merciful love and chose him" (MV, 8). This deep knowledge of Jesus' mercy toward him allowed the Pope to accept the call to leadership. His oft stated desire for a Church that "takes up the joyful call for mercy once more" prompted him to declare this special Jubilee Year (MV, 10). By meditating often on God's *hesed* as found in the psalms may we, during this year, be moved to gratitude for the loving mercy and forgiveness God has shown to us, joy in the knowledge of God's steadfast love, and a desire to bless the Lord with our very beings, reflected in our deeds of mercy and compassion to others.

#### (Footnotes)

1 All scripture texts used are from the *New American Bible, Revised Edition*.

2 Francis I, *Misericordiae Vultus: Bull of Indiction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy* (2015). no. 6, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_letters/documents/papa-francesco\\_bolla\\_20150411\\_misericordiae-vultus.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_bolla_20150411_misericordiae-vultus.html).

Director of Oblates: Br. Nathaniel Grossmann, O.S.B.

Editor: Vicki L. Gensini

**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, 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

## NOVEMBER 8 OBLATES DAY SCHEDULE

10:00 A.M.	Conventual Mass, within which oblates will renew their oblations
12:00 noon	Midday Prayer with the monks
12:15 P.M.	Lunch with the monks in the monastery refectory
After lunch	Gathering in the abbey church
2:30 P.M.	Conclusion of meeting

## Passage for *Lectio* at the September Meeting

Do not be provoked by evildoers;  
do not envy those who do wrong.  
Like grass they wither quickly;  
like green plants they wilt away.

*Psalms 37:1-2*

## Passage for *Lectio* at the October Meeting

From now on we regard no one according to the flesh; even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer. So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come. And all this is from God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and given us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting their trespasses against them and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, as if God were appealing through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

*2 Corinthians 5:16-21*

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## 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.

