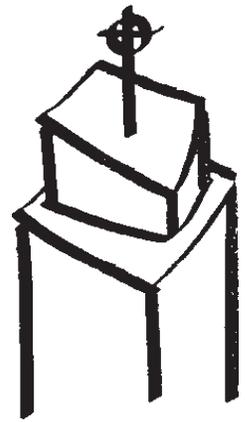


OUR FAMILY



NEWS



For Oblates of St. Bede Abbey, Peru, Illinois

Summer, 2013

Fr. Hugh Feiss, O.S.B., divides his time between the Monastery of the Ascension in Jerome, Idaho, and the Catholic student center at Boise State University. He has a doctorate in theology and taught theology, philosophy, and humanities at Mt. Angel Seminary for thirty years. He has published twenty books, mostly translations of medieval Latin writings. His Essential Monastic Wisdom (HarperCollins) was widely read in monastic and oblate circles. His research specialties are twelfth-century religious thinkers: the canons regular of St. Victor of Paris, Abbot Frowin of Engelberg, and Hildegard of Bingen. He has a long-standing interest in the intersection of theology and environmental issues. He gave a retreat at St. Bede decades ago and thought it was one of the nicest monasteries he ever visited.

(Because Fr. Hugh was gracious enough to compose his own curriculum vitae at my request, I shan't tamper with it in any way. I would only remark that, impressive as it is, it is still much too modest...and that Fr. Hugh was one of the best retreat masters and nicest guests St. Bede Abbey has ever had. --- Br. Nathaniel)



“Care is to be extended with the greatest solicitude”

Forty years ago, I was teaching an undergraduate course called “The Philosophy of Love.” I remember, perhaps inaccurately, that one of the authors we read described *agape*, the love that Jesus enjoins in the New Testament, as unselfish, caring concern for the good of another. By “caring” the author of the definition meant to say that *agape* actively sought to promote the other’s good. Recently, it was reported that a poll found that most people thought that caring is an essential part of love, though the report did not say what “caring” meant.

Those were the days of humanistic psychology. Drawing on that movement, Milton Mayeroff, a philosopher, wrote *On Caring* (Harper & Row, 1971). His theory is that caring is helping another person, community, or idea (or animal or tree) grow and actualize itself. A person is at home in the world, “not through dominating, or explaining, or appreciating, but through caring and being cared for.” I want the other to grow in its own right, but I feel that its growth is connected with my own. Caring requires many things—knowledge, patience, humility, and hope among them.

Mayeroff's book has many things right. He is not quite as convinced that we are all okay as were some authors of the time. Caring as he describes it presupposes and should foster maturity. He speaks of living "in faith," a way of being in the world that brings an "acute awareness of the unfathomable character of existence." He also speaks of gratitude toward nature and life for being able to care and be cared for. In my recollection, though, he never mentions God. In the end, what Mayeroff seems to say is that one could build a universe of meaning in which to live by being a genuinely caring person.



Christianity teaches us that there is a universe of meaning, in which we are invited and enabled to be genuinely caring people. It seems to me that near the heart of the good news of Jesus is his message and demonstration that God, who is uniquely his Father, cares for every person, lily, and bird. This "caring for" presupposes "caring about." Anyone who can take it for granted (as we often do) that the God who made a universe of billions of galaxies with billions of stars in each of them cares about him or her is jaded indeed. It is possible not to believe this good news; but it should be impossible to believe it and not be astounded by it. In Abraham Herschel's words, we who believe it should live in "abiding astonishment" at this care.

Our lives within this unfathomable universe of stars have their ups and downs, sometimes even deep pits and troughs. One can say, as a philosopher did, that if God wanted to use an evolutionary process to create mammals who were free to choose or reject life with God, there was bound to be sickness, death, and tragedy. True enough, but God so loved the world—cared for it so much—that he entered into it personally, chose to stand with us and for us in the midst of cruelty and death. God descended into the nether regions of our bodily existence to show us the way to resurrected life, not just after but in the midst of sorrow. If God cares that much about the troughs and valleys of existence that he entered them, I need to care too—for and about others and the natural world in which we all live.



I just finished a study of the use of the Latin word *cura* in the *Rule of Benedict*. This Latin word, from which come our words "care" and "cure," means a "charge" (to be charged with a responsibility) and taking care of someone or something. The abbot is in charge of the monks; he has been given and bears responsibility for them; he will be judged by God about how well he has carried out that responsibility. A German scholar has very perceptively translated Benedict's notion of *cura* as *Sorgfaltspflicht*, the duty to care. For St. Benedict, then, *cura* is a serious matter. Yet, there is a tender side to Benedict's use of the word; human nature itself draws us to care for the very young and the very old. However, Benedict does not leave these forms of *cura* to the vagaries of human feeling or inclination; he makes it a matter of the *Rule* that they be performed (37:1).



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Benedict writes, "in the reception of the poor and travelers, care is to be extended with the greatest solicitude" (53:15). Guests are to be cared for as though they are Christ. Whether by design or accident, "reception" is a word reserved by the *Rule of Benedict* for solemn occasions: it is used with reference to the reception of guests, the reception of new members, and the reception of the abbatial office. So receiving the poor and travelers is a very important activity. Very often the "poor" in question are those who feel there is no one who cares for them or about them. The monastery or the church community should be a place where the quality of human care extended to them

gives them a glimpse of the infinite care that holds them in being. As in confession Christ uses a human voice and a raised human hand to say, “I absolve you,” so in the reception of such poor, Christ wants to use human voices and welcoming hands to say, “I care about you—infininitely, to the point of dying for you.”



Several times a year students from the university where I am a part-time chaplain travel to Mexico to do service projects at several orphanages. On those trips they often find in themselves capacities to care that they didn’t know were there. Many of them report that the days they spent working all day to help the orphans were among the happiest of their lives. There are few more telling proofs of God’s care than the fact that God shares with us the capacity to care. When we care, or perhaps better, when we let God’s care work in and through us, we find joy, a joy that anticipates eternal life, which will be, as Pope Benedict XVI wrote, like “plunging into the ocean of infinite love, . . . a plunging ever anew into the vastness of being, in which we are simply overwhelmed with joy.”

--- Fr. Hugh Feiss, O.S.B.



Some Remarks by the Oblate Director

The oblate year 2011-12, devoted to a study of St. Benedict’s teaching on humility, culminated in a reflection by oblate Kathy Martin, in that year’s final issue of *Our Family News*, on Chapter 53 of the *Rule*, “The Reception of Guests.” The oblate year 2012-13, devoted to a study of St. Benedict’s teaching on mindfulness of God, has culminated in the above reflection by Fr. Hugh, in this year’s final issue of *Our Family News*, on the same text. I think that this is more than mere coincidence.

The fact alone is a good reminder that the *Rule* is not some random collection of teachings, however sound, and regulations, however sensible, but a true, that is, faithful, digest of the entire gospel, a sound compendium for the whole Christian life. As such, it is internally cohesive, in other words, “all of a piece.” That is why a consideration of humility in the *Rule* and a consideration of mindfulness of God in the *Rule* could and would lead, as indeed they have done, to a consideration of the same further matter.

That that “further matter” *is the same* is significant. *What* that “further matter” *is*, essentially, is even more so, for it is, in fact, central to the *Rule*. And it is central to the *Rule* precisely because it is central to the gospel. Significant, to be sure. However hackneyed, the advertising slogan “All roads lead to _____” (the blank to be filled in with the name of a vacation spot, an amusement park, a car dealer’s establishment, or any other destination) can serve well, I believe, to characterize the contents of the *Rule*. Considerations of every other teaching it contains, every element of the monastic life it treats, every practice it prescribes—all ultimately lead to a consideration of the teaching that is the “further matter” which Kathy and Fr. Hugh considered in their essays: the love of God and the love of one’s neighbor, the love of God *in* one’s neighbor, in the case at hand as found in St. Benedict’s teaching on the reception of guests.

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

Editor: Vicki L. Gensini

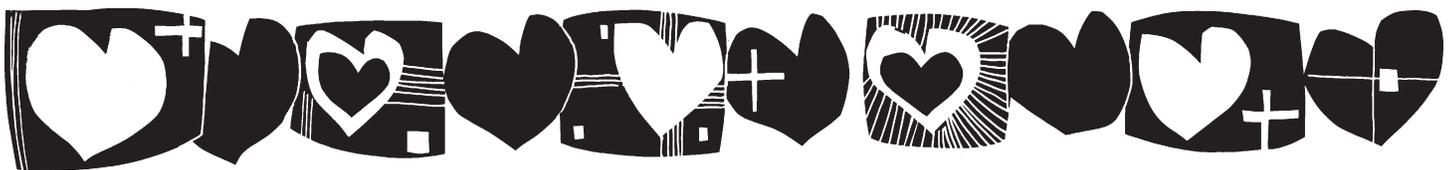
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We welcome your submissions to this publication, either instructive or reflective, whether prose or poetry. They should in some way relate to the **Rule of Benedict**, Benedictine spirituality, and/or the oblate program. The editor reserves the rights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

It is noteworthy that St. Benedict does not, in Chapter 53 of the *Rule*, quote Jesus' enunciation of the two greatest commandments in Mt 22:37-39, a passage unique to Matthew, but instead quotes, in the very first sentence of the chapter, from Mt 25:31-46, another passage unique to Matthew: "I was a stranger and you welcomed me." The entire passage is the familiar depiction by Jesus of the final judgment, "when the Son of Man comes in his glory," and it is in *this* passage that Jesus makes clear that to love one's neighbor *is* to love God. The criteria by which we shall be judged as worthy or unworthy to enter the Father's kingdom are the concrete ways in which we shall have or shall not have put the love of our neighbors into practice: "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me," and "whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."

A suggestion: reread Chapter 53 of the *Rule*, reread Fr. Hugh's essay, and then read (or reread) the homily that Pope Francis gave at his installation Mass on the Solemnity of St. Joseph (widely available in print and over the Internet). In the last of these, the pope describes the Christian vocation in terms of being, like St. Joseph, a protector: "Let us protect Christ in our lives, so that we can protect others, so that we can protect creation!" But he recognizes that "the vocation of being 'protector'...also has a prior dimension which is simply human, involving everyone," and which means, among other things, "respecting each of God's creatures and respecting the environment in which we live...protecting people, showing loving concern for each and every person, especially children, the elderly, those in need, who are often the last we think about." And, after proclaiming that "authentic power is service," he defines his own ministry in terms of the very passage in the Gospel of Matthew from which St. Benedict quotes at the start of Chapter 53 of the *Rule*, declaring that the pope "must open his arms to protect all of God's people and embrace with tender affection the whole of humanity, especially the poorest, the weakest, the least important, those whom Matthew lists in the final judgment on love: the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison. Only those who serve with love are able to protect!" Our Jesuit pope with the Franciscan name speaks with a distinctly Benedictine voice. I think that this is more than mere coincidence.

--- Br. Nathaniel



UPCOMING EVENT

The annual oblate picnic is set for

**Sunday, July 14,
from 12:00 Noon to 3:00 P.M.,**

in the shelter across from the academy.

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. Because lately the monks have been experimenting with the times of these services, please call (815) 223-3140 for a current schedule.

