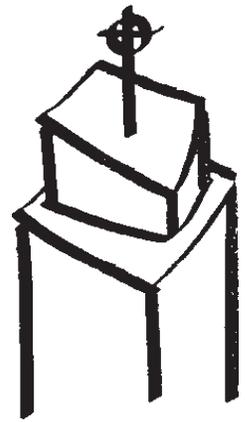


OUR FAMILY



NEWS



For Oblates of St. Bede Abbey, Peru, Illinois

September &
October, 2012

Dear Oblates,

Our monthly meetings this year will be devoted to an exploration of what in monastic parlance is commonly called “mindfulness of God.” One would be hard put to find a better introduction to the subject than the following essay by Fr. Claude Peifer, O.S.B., the seventh abbot of St. Bede Abbey and a noted biblical, patristic, and monastic scholar. Fr. Claude is the author of *Monastic Spirituality* (1966), a groundbreaking work in the early days of monastic renewal, was a major contributor to RB 1980, and was one of the editors of The New American Bible’s revised translation of the New Testament (1986), adopted by the American Catholic bishops for use in the Mass lectionary. His numerous writings on the monastic life have appeared in such journals as *Cistercian Studies* and *The American Benedictine Review*.

In the Lord,
Br. Nathaniel Grossmann, O.S.B.



MINDFULNESS OF GOD

The first step of humility is that, always keeping the fear of God before one’s eyes, one completely **banish forgetfulness** and always **be mindful** of everything that God commands (*Rule of St. Benedict*, 7,10).

This is the only passage in the *Rule* that mentions *oblivio*, forgetfulness, and it understands the term not of occasional memory lapses, but in its most radical spiritual dimension. In this sense, it is something that has no place in a monk’s life, for it is deadly. Such forgetfulness means the total absence from one’s consciousness of any thought of God, living as if he did not exist, or at least did not have anything to do with me and my life. It is a denial, or at least a casual ignoring, of my basic creatureliness, of all that is most fundamental about me, namely, that I am not the source of my own existence or destiny, but have been placed here by Another for a purpose.

For St. Benedict, to arrive at the point of escaping from this deadly state and opening oneself to the acknowledgment of God that he calls “fear of the Lord” constitutes the very *first* step of humility, and for him humility is a way of describing the entire spiritual life. So it is the rock-bottom beginning of the spiritual journey. Unless we banish this deadly *forgetfulness* of who we are and why we are here and replace it with *mindfulness* of what our true situation is, we cannot take any further step toward spiritual growth. This means that mindfulness is not only important; it is the essential starting place. But, as with every other element of the spiritual life, we can always come to understand it more thoroughly and to appreciate and develop it more effectively.

Since it is so fundamental, it appears prominently in the previous monastic tradition upon which St. Benedict drew. His favorite monastic theorist, Blessed John Cassian, has this to say about it in his famous tenth *Conference* on prayer, which he attributes to Abba Isaac of the Egyptian desert of Scetis:

You shall now be offered a formula for the discipline and prayer that you seek, which every monk who aims at constant mindfulness of God should reflect upon, ceaselessly turning it over in his heart, after banishing every other kind of thought, because he cannot concentrate on it unless he is freed from all bodily cares and concerns.... So this is the indispensable formula offered to you for acquiring constant mindfulness of God: O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me (*Conference* 10, 10).

This biblical text that Cassian offers us, and subsequently elaborates upon at length, which is the first verse of Psalm 69 (70), was appropriately chosen by St. Benedict for the opening of most of the hours of the divine office (*RB* 18, 1) and has been used for this purpose for centuries by the universal church in the *Liturgy of the Hours*. Since it is adaptable to every situation in which we find ourselves, as Cassian demonstrates at length in the rest of *Conference* 10, it can always be used as an ejaculation to help us to redirect our attention to that state of mindfulness of God that, as St. Benedict teaches, needs to become habitual in us. Thus attending to God's presence is what we sometimes call *virtual prayer*.

The other monastic predecessor, whose influence on St. Benedict was more subtle, but whom he mentions by name in chapter 73 as *our holy Father Basil*, was even more insistent on the importance of mindfulness of God. For him what prayer basically consists of is *memoria Dei*, the habitual memory of God. Basil, who after his university studies in Athens retired to a solitary property owned by his upper-class but devoutly Christian family in order to live the Christian life in a serious way according to the Scriptures, never speaks of monks or nuns or uses strictly monastic terminology. He simply sought a radical form of living the gospel. When many followers came later and looked to him for guidance, the replies to their questions that he wrote for their direction became what were later called his "rules." There he says:

Anyone who wants truly to follow God must be freed from the chains of attachment to this life. Now this is achieved by complete retirement from and abandonment of our former habits.... After we have done this, we have to preserve our hearts with all watchfulness, so that we never lose the awareness of God or defile the memory of his wondrous deeds with imaginings of vain things, but retain the holy thought of God with constant and pure memory imprinted upon our souls like an indelible seal. In this way love for God increases within us, if the memory of him constantly enlightens our mind and dispositions, inciting us to the work of God's commandments, and being in turn preserved by them in constancy and security (*Longer Rule* 5).

This theme of *mindfulness of God* gained widespread currency in subsequent monastic literature and underwent a rich development in later spiritual writers in both East and West. But where did it originally come from? As might be expected, it has its primary source in the Scriptures. The Israelites' awareness of their very identity as a people arose from their memory of what God had done on their behalf: he had called them together as a people, rescued them from slavery, delivered them from the power of the Egyptians, and guided their journey through the desert into the promised land. Their first duty was to be *mindful* of what he had done for them.

Deuteronomy harps upon this theme repeatedly, insisting: "Always remember! Don't forget!" *Remember that you...were once slaves in the land of Egypt, and the LORD, your God, brought you out from there with a strong hand and outstretched arm* (5,15). *Remember how for these forty years the LORD, your God, has directed all your journeying in the wilder-*

ness, so as to test you by affliction, to know what was in your heart: to keep his commandments, or not (8,2). Remember then the Lord, your God,...the covenant he swore to your ancestors. But if you do forget the Lord, your God, and go after other gods, serving and bowing down to them, I bear witness to you this day that you will perish utterly (8,18-19).

That is the basic message of the Old Testament, which was to be constantly drummed into the heads of every successive generation of Israel. *Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone! Take to heart these words.... Keep repeating them to your children...be careful not to forget the LORD, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that house of slavery* (6, 4.6.7.12). The greatest possible disaster would be to fall into forgetfulness. That is why in Ps 77 (76), 4 we find the text, *I remembered God and rejoiced*, a passage that was cited by the Church Fathers to evoke mindfulness of God.

In the New Testament the theme is equally prominent, but now there is much more to remember. Not only did God look after his days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, redeem us by his blood and to teach the tomb the heavenly messengers *ad-what he said to you while he was still in words* (Lk 24, 6.8).

In the great sermon at the promised, *The Advocate, the holy Spirit he will teach you everything and remind* At the institution of the Eucharist (Lk 22, 19). That is why in our faith role is occupied by what the New Greek word for *remembrance*. We are constantly rereading the Scriptures in order to *remember*, to remain mindful of all the wondrous deeds that God has performed for us throughout sacred history.



people continually ever since the but he has now sent his Son to us the way to life. The New Testament of Jesus that the disciples had re-they had drawn from them. At the monished the women, *Remember Galilee.... And they remembered his*

supper in St. John's Gospel, Jesus *that the Father will send in my name— you of all that I told you* (Jn 14, 26). Jesus said,...*do this in memory of me and practice such an important Testament calls anamnesis, the*

But the *anamnesis* is something that we especially perform in the celebration of the Eucharist, in fulfillment of Jesus' explicit command that we do this in memory of him. In each of the Eucharistic Prayers that constitute the central part of the Mass, the prayer that is offered immediately after the consecration is called the *Anamnesis*, the "remembrance prayer." In it, beginning with "Therefore," we explicitly recall the major events of sacred history that accomplished our salvation, as he commanded us to do:

"Therefore, O Lord, as we now celebrate the memorial of our redemption, we remember Christ's Death and his descent to the realm of the dead, we proclaim his Resurrection and his Ascension to your right hand, and, as we await his coming in glory, we offer you his Body and Blood, the sacrifice acceptable to you which brings salvation to the whole world" (EPIV).

Our Christian vocation itself demands that we be mindful of God and of what he has done for us. No wonder that St. Benedict finds this quality of mindfulness to be the most elementary starting point of the spiritual life. Our ongoing challenge is to convert this habitual disposition into a conscious and active influence in our life, so that whatever we think and do becomes in effect a form of prayer.

---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 St. 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 16, 2012

Sunday, October 14, 2012

Sunday, November 11, 2012--

OBLATES DAY

(Special schedule to be announced.)

Sunday, December 2, 2012

Sunday, January 13, 2013

Sunday, February 10, 2013

Sunday, March 10, 2013

Sunday, April 14, 2013

Sunday, May 5, 2013

Passages for *Lectio* at the September Meeting

The safest road to Hell is the gradual one--the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.

C. S. Lewis

While others talked about what they would do if they heard that they had to die within that very hour, Saint Charles Borromeus said he would continue his game of chess. For he had begun it only in honor of God, and he could wish for nothing better than to be called away in the midst of an action undertaken in the honor of God.

William Faber

Passage for *Lectio* at the October Meeting

In Lystra there sat a man crippled in his feet, who was lame from birth and had never walked. He listened to Paul as he was speaking. Paul looked directly at him, saw that he had faith to be healed and called out, "Stand up on your feet!" At that, the man jumped up and began to walk.

When the crowd saw what Paul had done, they shouted in the Lycaonian language, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes because he was the chief speaker. The priest of Zeus, whose temple was just outside the city, brought bulls and wreaths to the city gates because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them.

Acts of the Apostles 14:8-13

Copies of these passages will be available at the meetings.

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**
7:20 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, 5:30 P.M.

