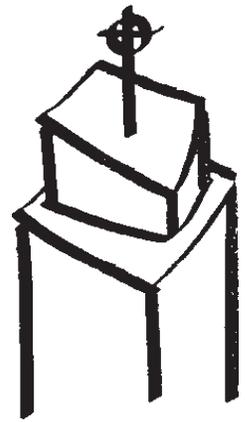


OUR FAMILY



NEWS



For Oblates of St. Bede Abbey, Peru, Illinois

September &
October, 2013

A Letter from the Director of Oblates

Dear Oblate,

Indulge me, if you will. I would like to kick off the year with a survey of sorts, a brief one, consisting of only three questions. I ask that you answer the questions in the order in which they are asked and that, although only you yourself will be privy to your responses, you give each question sufficient time and thought to answer it, not necessarily at length, but seriously. If you would find it helpful to jot down your thoughts on paper, by all means do so. And I ask that you not move on to the succeeding paragraph until you *have* responded to the questions. Here goes.

First, what can you say about your personal relationship with God our Father? Next, what can you say about your personal relationship with his Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior? Finally, what can you say about your personal relationship with their Holy Spirit, our Advocate?

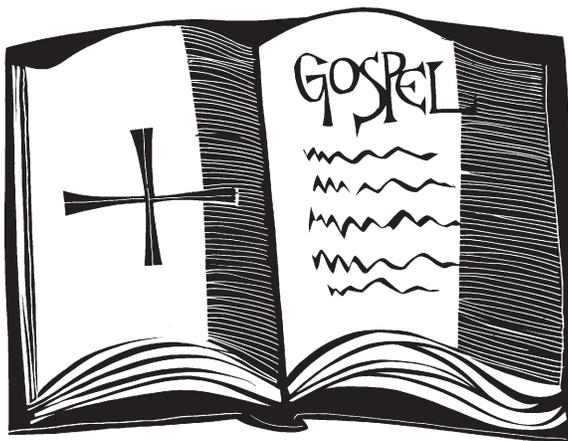
I would hazard a guess that, however readily you were able to respond to the first two questions, you were far less readily able to respond to the third. Ironic as it may be, in that life of ours which we call “spiritual,” it is, of the Three Divine Persons, the Spirit of whom we are least conscious. Indeed, the Holy Spirit can be said to be the overlooked, the neglected, the almost forgotten Divine Person.

Just what has brought about this state of affairs? The answer, which may surprise you, is as simple as the state of affairs is lamentable: the deficiency, or at least the insufficiency, of the representations of the Holy Spirit in art, however much they are scripturally inspired—or as Kenneth Clark has expressed it, “the failure to discover a satisfactory symbol for the Holy Ghost,” to hit upon “a compelling image,” a failure, as he has further noted, that “has seriously impaired our concept of the Trinity.”

We can without too much difficulty relate to a person who is very often represented, even if among other

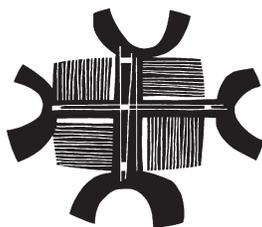
things, *as* a person. We cannot so easily relate to a person who is very rarely represented as one, who is represented almost exclusively as a dove, a tongue of fire, a gust of wind, or a combination of any or all of these. There *do* exist, in the art of the Western Church, representations of the Trinity as a head with three identical faces, but these are few and, in any case, being pictorial rather than sculptural, not very convincing: their two-dimensionality weakens the very concept of the equality of the Three Divine Persons that they are meant to convey.

By this time, no doubt, you are wondering what all this has to do with the price of tea in China. Well, with the price of tea in



China—or anywhere else—nothing. But it has quite a lot to do with that fundamental component of monastic—to be sure, of Christian—life known as *lectio divina* (sacred reading), the exploration of which will occupy the oblates of St. Bede Abbey throughout the coming year. For while our conscious awareness of and attention to the activity of the Holy Spirit in general perhaps cannot be *underestimated*, the activity of the Holy Spirit in *lectio divina* certainly cannot be *overestimated*. As powerfully as the Spirit is able to act all unseen and unknown, if we are to engage in *lectio divina* most fruitfully, we need to sharply attune ourselves to and willingly cooperate in the work of the Spirit within us. And to do *that*, we need first to understand just what the role of the Holy Spirit in *lectio divina* is.

Accordingly, *Our Family News* offers to its readers the following essay by Fr. Claude, in which, without ever mentioning *lectio divina* by name, he masterfully elucidates the part played by the Spirit in the search for God that is its essence.



---Br. Nathaniel

“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you to all truth.” (John 16:13)



In St. John’s version of the passion story, he says that Jesus declared before the Roman governor, *I came into the world to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice* (Jn 18:37). This statement caused Pontius Pilate to ask, “*What is truth?*” (Jn 18:38). We may justifiably ask the same question, for St. John also says in his Gospel that Jesus had told his disciples earlier, at the Last Supper, *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you to all truth* (Jn 16:13)—a promise made, not only to those then gathered around him at table, but to all his disciples down through the ages. What is this *truth* to which we, too, hope to be guided?

For us truth means reality as perceived by our mind: it is something we can *believe*. For the Semitic mind, however, truth is rather something that we can *trust*. It is reliable, steadfast, dependable, something that does not collapse and ruin us when we place our confidence in it. For us truth is an intellectual concept, and so we want to know whether a story, for instance, is *true*, that is, if it actually happened. In the Bible that is not the primary concern, but rather whether it is *genuine* and therefore *reliable*. In the Scriptures truth affects not only our mind, but our whole person: it enters into our life. The question is not simply, Can we believe it? but rather, Can we put our trust in it and commit ourselves to it personally?

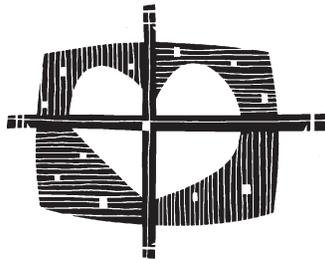
For St. John it is clear that truth—the thing to which we can really entrust ourselves—is the reality of God as revealed to us in the teaching and the person of Jesus Christ. This is the ultimate truth, and alongside it all merely human

realities and achievements, no matter how impressive, are utterly unreliable, even falsehoods. They cannot lead us to where we really need to go. A person who does not come to recognize this truth remains in benighted ignorance, for he or she has not discovered the meaning of life and is still wandering in confusion. That is why the truth will make us free. This is a freedom not from intellectual ignorance, but from sin and the false directions we might take in our life. Jesus is *full of grace and truth* (Jn 1:14); he is himself *the way, the truth, and the life* (Jn 14:6). Only in him do we find our own inner truth and ultimate meaning.

This is what the disciples gradually learned about Jesus during his ministry, but fully understood only in the light of his resurrection. But what of future disciples? In his farewell at the supper he assured those at table with him that he would continue to be present to make the truth of God known to all who would come afterwards, but in a different way: no longer by a visible, human presence, but by a spiritual and interior presence perceptible only by faith. This is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate who remains among us and within us to guide us to Jesus, who is the way and the truth that leads to life. The Spirit is for us what Jesus was to the Twelve. That is why Jesus said of him, *He will not speak on his own, but he will speak what he hears.... He will take from what is mine and declare it to you* (Jn 16:13-14).

It is the teaching of Jesus—and Jesus himself—that the Spirit communicates to us, not anything new. We are not to expect any new revelations, for the Old and New Testaments already contain everything that we need to know for salvation. The authentic revelations that have been given to genuine mystics merely reinforce what the Scriptures already tell us. But for St. John teaching is not merely imparting information without touching the heart. Doctrine has to penetrate to the innermost depths of our being and become part of us in order to change us. This is the work of the Spirit: to take the word of Jesus—indeed, the Word that is Jesus—and plant it in our hearts, let it take root there, and carefully nourish it. The Spirit enables us to understand Jesus' word from within, in the light of faith, to see all its richness, its ramifications for the life of the Church in our own time and circumstances. He is our interior instructor, who fulfills the prophecy of Jeremiah: *I will put my law within them and will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people* (Jer 31:33).

The Spirit is working in all of us—he has been working in us ever since we received him in baptism—to open our hearts to the message of Jesus, to bring us to a more generous surrender of ourselves to his truth. Unfortunately our hearts are hard, and it is difficult for him to make that truth penetrate when it has to compete with other, conflicting messages. *Today if you should hear his voice, harden not your hearts* (Ps 95:7-8). Jesus, the incarnate Word, has revealed God to us; the Spirit, bond of love, opens the human heart to the mysteries of the divine life.



--- Fr. Claude Peifer, O.S.B.

**"Now this is eternal life:
that they know you, the only true God,
and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."**

John 17:3

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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.

SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETINGS

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

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2013

Sunday, October 13, 2013

Sunday, November 10, 2013--

OBLATES DAY

(*Special schedule to be announced.*)

Sunday, December 8, 2013

Sunday, January 12, 2014

Sunday, February 9, 2014

Sunday, March 9, 2014

Sunday, April 6, 2014

Sunday, May 4, 2014

Passage for *Lectio* at the September Meeting

“For it is love that I desire, not sacrifice,
and knowledge of God, not holocausts.”

Hosea 6:6

Passage for *Lectio* at the October Meeting

“I shall plant my law deep within them
and write it on their hearts. I will be
their God, and they shall be my people.
No longer will they teach their friends
and relatives, ‘Know the Lord!’ They
will all know me, from the least of them
to the greatest,” says the Lord, “for I shall
forgive their wickedness and remember
their sins no more.”

Jeremiah 31:33-34

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.

