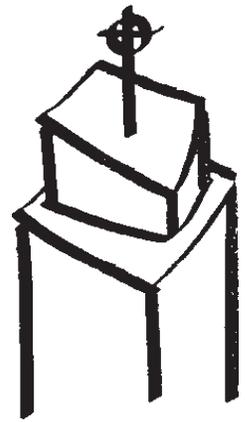


OUR FAMILY



NEWS



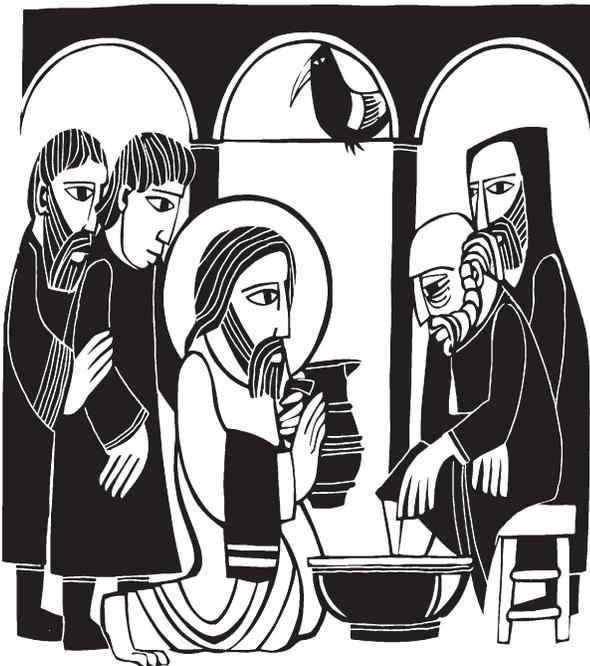
For Oblates of St. Bede Abbey, Peru, Illinois

March &
April, 2014

A HOMILY FOR HOLY THURSDAY

A person who has bathed has no need except to have his feet washed, for he is clean all over; and you are clean.... If I..., the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you should wash one another's feet (Jn 13:10.14).

Holy Thursday is a day that has been devoted to several different activities in the life of the Church. In the early Church it was the day of reconciliation of penitents, who had performed acts of public penance all during Lent. It is the day when the sacred chrism is to be consecrated by the bishop, together with the oils used in the sacraments of baptism and anointing of the sick, although this ritual may now be celebrated on another day. It is the anniversary of the institution of the priesthood and therefore the day when we give thanks for the gift of the priesthood, and priests renew their commitment to their ministry. But in the minds of all Christians, it is preeminently the day of the Holy Eucharist, when the Lord Jesus, at the Last Supper with his disciples, instituted the new covenant that had been foretold by the prophet Jeremiah and gave us the sacrament of his Body and Blood for the redemption of the world.



All three of the synoptic evangelists describe this scene at the Last Supper, which has been recorded in countless paintings and other works of art. Moreover, in his first letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul provides a similar account, which he says he received "from the Lord" (1 Cor 11:23). It is surprising, then, that the Gospel passage that we read on this day, which is taken from St. John's account of the Supper, does not even mention the institution of the Eucharist. In fact, John says nothing of its *institution* anywhere in his Gospel, although he is vividly aware of the importance of the Eucharist in the teaching of Jesus and in the life of the Church. But in his account of the Last Supper the centerpiece is not the Eucharist, but rather the washing of the feet. The evangelist wishes to emphasize that on

that solemn occasion Jesus performed for his disciples a service that was usually reserved for a slave. What is the meaning of this episode, to which St. John attributes such importance?

In the context of the passion narrative that follows, the washing of the disciples' feet is a prophetic gesture symbolizing the whole of Jesus' saving ministry, and above all his imminent death, which was undertaken in humble self-abasement for the salvation of sinners. The early hymn that St. Paul quotes in his letter to the Philippians says that, unlike Adam, who tried to seize divinity for himself, Jesus voluntarily descended from his divine state into our humanity, took on the form of a slave, and accepted obedience even to death on a cross (Phil 2:6-8). This is what he is modeling here in this dramatic gesture: far from displaying his glory, he kneels before us like a slave, washes our dirty feet and dries them, to make us clean enough to sit at table and share a meal with him. Here we have the entire drama of the redemption acted out in a single dramatic scene, prophesying what was to happen the next day on Calvary and what would be the effect of his sacrifice for us.

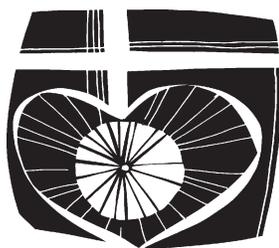
St. John's understanding of this Gospel passage of his is complex, because it seems that more than one interpretation of it is already in the text itself. All religions have developed systems of purification, because they all sense that we as worshipers are defiled and in need of cleansing before we can dare to stand before God. Jesus brought about a radical transformation of this idea by making it clear that purity cannot be acquired by any prescribed ritual action, but depends upon the condition of our heart. *Blessed are the pure of heart, for they will see God* (Mt 5:8). Of ourselves we are unable to attain such purity; only God can confer it upon us. In the Acts of the Apostles, when St. Peter at the Council of Jerusalem explains why the pagans could be admitted to the Church without first submitting to the Mosaic Law, he says, *God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by granting them the Holy Spirit just as he did us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith* (Acts 15:8-9). And later on in St. John's Gospel, in the discourse at the Supper, Jesus says, *You are already made clean because of the word that I have spoken to you* (Jn 15:3). We have been cleansed by faith in the word of God. Jesus cleanses us to make us worthy to sit at the Eucharistic banquet with him.

But we who have received such a gift have not received it solely for ourselves; we have a responsibility to pass it on to others. Immediately after washing the feet of the disciples, Jesus tells them, *If I..., the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you should wash one another's feet* (Jn 13:14), and not long after that, *I give you a new commandment: love one another. Just as I have loved you, so you must love one another* (Jn 13:34). The gift and the obligation to give belong together. In the next chapter of St. John's Gospel Jesus says, further, *Whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father* (Jn 14:12). Not only does he enable us to do his works; his action becomes ours and our action becomes his, for he is acting within us through his Spirit, conferred upon us because he has gone to the Father. St. Paul shows his understanding of this when, in writing to the Galatians, he tells them, *No longer is it I who live, but Christ who lives in me* (Gal 2:20). The washing of our

feet, which represents the supreme gift of Jesus' self-abasement in his passion and death, now perpetuated in the sacrament of his Body and Blood, cleanses us to enable us to take a place at his table, but is meant then to unfold in the dynamic of living and acting in such a way as to extend his gift to all others whom we meet.

On this day Jesus says to us, *I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you* (Lk 22:15). Lord, you desire each one of us; you want us to be with you. You want to wash our feet, to cleanse us of the defilement of our sinfulness. You want to share yourself with us in the Holy Eucharist, to be united to us. Lord, give us the grace to desire to be with you, to be cleansed by you and seated at your table. Strengthen our desire to be united to you and to one another. Grant unity to your Church and to all who remain outside it, so that the world may find faith and peace in you. Amen.

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



In your prayers, kindly remember oblate Cecilia Jais, who passed away January 12 at the age of ninety-nine.

Cecilia was a remarkable woman and exemplary Christian who unstintingly served her God, her family, and her neighbors in quiet simplicity throughout her life. She devoted most of her years to the care of her parents. For the past five decades she provided a hand-sewn baptismal garment for every infant christened at her parish church, St. Joseph, Peru. When she was still able, she also actively served in that church's Altar and Rosary Society.

Proud to be an oblate of St. Bede Abbey, she supported the oblate program generously with both prayers and contributions, even when she was no longer able to attend meetings or participate in other oblate activities.

Cecilia's nephew Robert and his wife Joan have made a considerable donation to the oblate program in her memory. Their gift will be used toward the purchase of a very fine set of commentaries on the four Gospels for the oblate library. I am—as I'm sure you now are—most grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Jais for their largesse. Please remember them in your prayers as well.

---Br. Nathaniel

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.

Passage for *Lectio* at the March Meeting

What I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Philippians 3:10-11

Passages for *Lectio* at the April Meeting

Formerly, when you did not know God, you became slaves to "gods" who are not really gods at all. But now that you have come to know God--or rather to be known by God--how can you turn back to those elemental powers that can do nothing and give nothing? Do you want to be slaves all over again?

Galatians 4:8-9

When Jesus saw Nathaniel coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is no guile." Nathaniel asked him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Philip called you, while you were under the fig tree, I saw you." Nathaniel declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

John 1:47-49

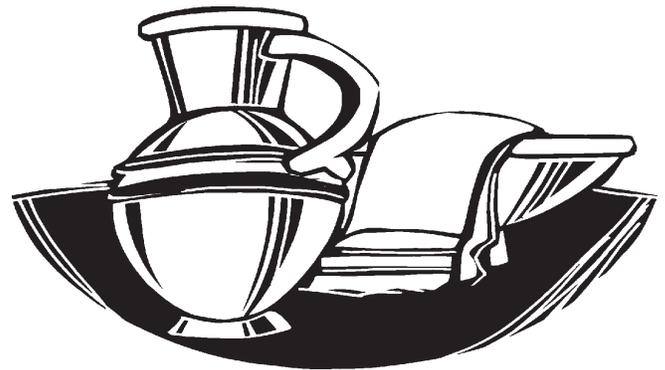
SCHEDULE OF UPCOMING MEETINGS

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

SUNDAY, MARCH 9, 2014

Sunday, April 6, 2014

Sunday, May 4, 2014



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, 5:30 P.M.

